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BY THE EDITOR

• The June 1957 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* contained an article of special interest to me. It may seem odd to quote from a June issue five months later, but the article had to do with a lost planet, which could hardly be classed as an item of momentary interest. According to Author N. J. Berrill, the planet in question exploded and threw meteors of various size and content all over the solar system, many of which buried themselves in the Earth's crust.

By various methods, including the breakdown of uranium content, scientists, after testing the meteorites, conclude that our lost planet was formed a scant $4\frac{1}{2}$ billion years ago and, based on the cosmic timetable, exploded a few hundred millions years back. Or, in terms of the human span, sometime late yesterday afternoon.

The scientists are not of the opinion that the inhabitants blew their own world from underfoot, or that the planet was even possessed of inhabitants. Majority opinion leans to the theory that the planet died from bad traffic regulation—some sort of cosmic collision.

Be that as it may, the point I wish to make is this: all you science fiction writers who have been making a good—though rather shame-faced—living by writing hair-raising adventure stories about Earth's twin-planet, need no longer blush when you pass friends in the street. Earth had a twin-planet.

So stop mailing in your manuscripts under aliases and deliver them in person. You've been vindicated. And by no less dignified and august a publication than the grand old *Atlantic Monthly*.—PWF

AMAZING

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CHILDREN OF CHAOS

By IVAR JORGENSEN

*Born to an age of destruction
these Sons and Daughters of
Disaster said, "Stand back!
I'll show you how to
really blow this world into
stardust. Then you can
start over."*

SO OKAY, so maybe a guy who lost his private investigator's license over a little thing like libel *isn't* the best guy to stumble over a thing like the Kids. So maybe the same guy—who had to start selling brushes door-to-door to keep on eating—*ain't* the best guy to save the World. So the hell what? So *somebody* had to do it, and it just happened I knew Niles Pfizer from when I was a private eye, and he called me when he found her body. So don't beef; you still breathe regular, and you don't have bombs sending your house into the sky—with you in it.



The glove—stuffed solid with



coins—crashed against my skull like a sledge hammer.

So don't beef. I had a *right* to beef; it was dirty, all the way through; but *you*, you've got no reason to beef at all; absolutely none.

The beefing started for me at five in the morning, one day about three months ago. I was pounding my ear and hand-measuring Sophia's bosom for publicity releases, when the damned phone went off like a shotgun in my head. I cursed the Italian Board of Commerce for disturbing me, and then realized it wasn't a brace of Sicilian partisans shooting at me, but just the phone. I disentangled myself from the sweaty sheets, un-mugged my mouth, and flopped around till my hand encountered the phone.

"Mggg?" I asked.

"Lunch? Is that you, Ray?"

"Szm-mggg," I conceded, and started to drift back to the sunny climes and heaving hills.

"Ray! Damit, Ray, answer me. Is that you? Niles Pfizer on this end, Lunch. Damn you, *wake up!*"

Bang! That was the secret phrase. Down came the duck, and handed me a five-hundred-dollar bill for saying the common everyday secret phrase, and I snapped awake. "Yeah, yeah, Niles. It's me.

angrily, "—what hour is it?" What the hell you doing calling me at this hour. By the way—" I interrupted myself

"Never mind the kidding around, Ray. I got trouble. I'm not fooling . . . I walked in here and, oh, for the luva heaven, Ray, you should see her, she's . . ." He went off in a fit of deep breathing, as though he had his first shove into his mouth, and in the silence I said:

"What the blazes is happening over there, Niles? You flipped your snapper tonight?"

He came back real strong, and tight, as though he were speaking for clarity, and said slowly, "Ray, I need your help. I need it now. Can you come over here right now?"

I reached up a bit and clicked on the bed lamp. The portable clock by the phone read 5:17 and I screwed one of my baby-blue eyes to the darkness outside the window. "What the hell, Niles! Are you kidding or something? If this is another one of your stupid Behemian practical jokes . . ."

His tone was so drippy with scare I knew he wasn't kidding. Niles as a glamour photographer was one of the best in New York, even though he was a snob and had always had a bit too much money and

momma's apron string for his own good; he was addicted to practical jokery, but this just didn't sound right. There was a keen edge of hysteria in his voice. "Ray—"

Just that one damned desperate word, and I knew I'd lost sleep for that night.

"Okay, Niles. Sit tight. I'll be right over, whatever it is."

Silence for a second, then, softly, gratefully, "Thanks a million, Ray. It's pretty bad over here. I'm—"

I cut him off. "I'll be on my way in ten. Have a pot of coffee on. At least at this hour I won't have to apologize for freeloading." I hung on him, and got out of bed.

That was the beginning of the beef, but far from the end.

Niles Pfizer lived in one of those classy apartments above the shops on Sullivan Street in the Village. It was the sort of place that had a good North light, a long flight of stairs, and about ten thousand dollars' worth of modern furniture and imitation-Klee designs on the walls. I always took my time walking that flight from the street, because Niles had thoughtfully hung about half a hundred glossies in frames, of his most famous glamour shots. I had to admit it, Niles had one huluvan eye for the roundity and the point-

edy. This time I took the stairs two at a time.

As I hit the last flight, turning sharp around the banister, I stopped. The light was out in the hall. That was not like Niles. He hated darkness—always said his livelihood and life depended on light—and would never have let a bulb burn out in that hall.

Then I heard the sounds of a scuffle above me, and a second later a sort of nasty pffft! I took that last flight at a dead run. It was darker than the inside of a boot, and I came up snout-first against the closed door of the apartment. But it wasn't really closed, just shut nearly all the way, and I kept right on going. I slammed into the middle of the room, and by the moonlight pouring down through the skylight saw four figures tusseling around. I recognized one of them at once; it was the long-nosed, nearly-bald profile of Pfizer. The other three were shorter, and they were doing something unhappy to the photographer:

Where Niles's belly should have been, there was a pulsing blue glow—and through the glow I could see the darkness of the room. They had blown a hole clean through him.

He was still standing somehow, and the three were more

surprised than frightened, it seemed to me. I spent only a moment allowing myself to seem, and took a dive for the ones nearest me. I came down hard on one of them, and locked both my hands together. I put my clasped hands hard against his left temple, and heard a dull thunk as I belted him. He staggered off sideways, clutching his head, and moved away just in time for me to belt the second one in the mouth.

The louse had buck teeth!

I thought for a minute I'd broken every finger on my right hand. I had to backhand the slob with my left, and he tumbled over his own legs hitting the deck.

The third one was busily clubbing Niles in the skull, and for a second he didn't quite realize he was being visited. I had just enough time to pick up a wrought-iron candlestick holder from the table beside the door, and swing it with all my might. Man, did he squish! It caught him dead-eye in the nose, and he bleated as though I'd ripped it off. He followed his buddy.

The first one was still standing . . . I hadn't really cold-caulked him . . . and I didn't know it till he slammed me with a sledgehammer. It must have been a sledgeham-

mer, because I heard the clang. I spun around—half of my own volition, half because the blow had sent me that way—and put two fingers on his Adam's apple. He went glugging and took a header. He hit the deck and swam the length of the carpet glugging. I picked him out through the dusk and the moonlight and the fuzz in my head, and took a two-step toward him. The one was a step, the two was a kick. It caught him right in the neck and he just collapsed like a bride's first cake.

For a moment I stood there, swaying, while the gray lining of my skull pulsed in and out. Then I saw the blue glow that was the middle of Niles Pfizer, sink to the floor. I staggered to the wall, and hit the light switch. The joint was crawling with bodies.

In a heap nearest me, the three slobes were still stoned. In the middle foreground, Niles Pfizer was lying on his side, clutching his wounded middle, and breathing heavily. His face was a dead white, and in the light, the blue glow was gone. But the hole wasn't.

He was dying.

In the background was still another body. She was all hunched over on the model's stand, stark naked, and with-

out much of her head left. Whatever had done anything as ugly as that to a head as pretty as hers had been, had done it not by blasting, but by melting. The bone showed through starkly, and it wasn't shattered, but run-together and soft looking, as though she had been made of glass, and they had played an oxy-acetylene torch on her.

Hell, she had been dead for some time.

"R-Ray . . ." I heard Niles gasp, and dragged my eyes off the nude body on the stand. He was staring up at me out of pain-clogged eyes, and I could see he was heading out but quick. I went over to him, my head still throbbing, and bent over. He tried to raise up, and succeeded in getting onto one elbow. I helped him a little, cradling his head on my lap.

He looked up and tried a grin. It didn't show through the pain. "Th-they must have been watching from outside . . ." he said slowly. Each word was a torment. "Af-ter I—I called you . . . they came in. They d-didn't even s-say any, anything. Th-they l-looked around, and searched m-me, and then I tried t-to get away, Ray. They shot me with a-a—something, and it burns, Ray. It burns so bad. You'll never know how it burns in me,

Ray." His face twisted in a hideous grimace, and for an instant I thought he was bailing out on me. I bent lower, as his eyelids closed, but he kept right on talking. I'd never credited the guy with so much gut.

"H-her n-n-name was Mar-tita Delgado," he said, gasping, but going on doggedly as if he was keeping Death away by talking. "I was going t-to do some late-night stuff, w-with the city as a b-b-back-drop . . . up on th-the roof. She g-got here a little bit before me, and let her-herself in. M-most of m-my model's have their own keys—" he gave me that devillish grin the girls thought was so sexy, even with all that pain in him, and I had to grin back or regret it the rest of my life. The guy was going to get it all out before he conked, and I was going to stick with him till the end.

"W-when I g-got here, she was d-d-dead, and I l-looked th-through her stuff. She had a card in her purse, R-R-R . . ." he couldn't get my name out. I nodded to show I understood. "It's underneath the canvas over th-there—" he pointed to a stack of artist's canvases leaning against the far wall. "Th-they must have come back for it, or for something,

and they f-found me h-h-here.

"I d-don't know what they w-wanted, Ray. But they didn't get it . . . they d-dinnnt guhhhh . . ."

He trailed off and was gone as silently as the shadows.

I let his head slip down, and avoided looking at the hole where his gut had been. How he had lived long enough to give me such a detailed history I'll never to this day know, but but it had been compulsive. He had willed himself to tell me everything he knew, as though he'd known I'd need it.

Damn him . . . he had made me a party to it all, just by that speech. Just by giving it all, pouring it all out, he had made me an integral part of this tragedy. Now I was in it, because of all he had said and I was the only one who knew it, and because I held his head in my lap, and because of a hundred other things.

I sat there on my knees, and cursed myself and him for dying, and the whole world for making me a stinking moralist, and putting me into something I didn't want.

Ever since I'd lost my ticket, I'd sworn to myself I'd stay away from trouble. Now here it was eating at my leg, and making me jump into the

cauldron. I wanted out, but there was no way out.

I had to follow through, or know I'd be damned if I didn't.

I let his body slip off my lap, onto the floor, and started to get up. I had never been the closest friends with Niles Pfizer, but now we were brothers and I had to—not avenge his death; hell, that was corny and just not true—find out what was behind all this. Who had done it, and why. I *had* to, just because I *had* to! He'd stuck me with it, right through to the end.

I stood up, and heard the three hoods moving around behind me, on the floor. I turned to them, and they were all awake, and groggy, and looking at one another. They didn't say a word, and how they communicated I don't know, but each of them touched a thumb hard to the depression behind their left ears, and, well, I don't believe it myself, so why the hell should you—they turned to dust.

Just like that. No by-your-leave. No farewells or shuffle-off-to-Buffalos, they just were three tidy heaps of dust on the floor. Pouff! Gone!

I stared at the dust for a minute, and thought I was losing my mind completely. What the blazes was this? What the hell was happening?

Was this a long, detailed nightmare?

Wakened out of a dead sleep, hauled down to a Bohemian photographer's studio, attacked by three thugs, seen a friend have a big glowing blue hole blown in him, seen a nude model with another hole in her head, and now the three hoods had collapsed into dust—why, of course, I must be dreaming!

I didn't pinch myself, I methodically walked over to the edge of the table and banged my crazy bone down on it. It hurt like hell, and I knew I was awake.

Pfizer was dead, Martita Delgado was dead, and the hoods were dust at my feet. Poof, like that.

Before I knew what I was doing, and before I could draw my senses around me to get me the hell out of there, I was at the canvases, and puttering around till I found the little square of pasteboard stuck in the back of a canvas. It was hardly visible.

I took it out, and read the name and address someone—I assumed it had been Martita Delgado—had written in ink. It said Freidl, 6682 Riverside Drive, GR 2-7390. I turned the card over.

In neat block print it said:

CHILDREN OF CHAOS

Sins of our fathers, our heritage.

And underneath that was a line with the word *Advocate* under it. Martita Delgado had signed the card. I had the impression if she had had enough ball-point blood to use, she would have signed the thing in blood.

It was fairly evident what had happened. But not why. Martita Delgado had come to Pfizer's studio for the night work, and had been followed. She had been murdered, and the assassins had left. Then, as an afterthought, they had forgotten to take the card with them. They had come back, but by then, Niles had called me, and had secreted the card. (It just had the *look* of strangeness and importance about it, so I could see why he would assume—as I had assumed—that it was what they had been after.) They had attacked Niles, and finally shot him with whatever it took to make that melty blue hole in a man, when he would not give them the card. Then I had showed. They had realized I had seen their faces, and so—I banged my elbow again when I thought of it . . .

They had turned to dust.

I tucked the card into my

shirt pocket, and turned off the lights. I closed the door behind me, leaving the works—with my prints rubbed off the canvases, the doorknob and the light switch—for the cops to try and unravel.

If they could.

It was a long wait till the bars opened.

A long, chilly wait. But I had company.

The card.

And fear.

A straight rye that early in the morning was pure uncommon crap. It tasted like someone was painting my throat passages with napalm. I downed two, and gave the whole thing up as a bad bit. Finally, I piled back into the De Soto and tooled uptown to my pad. The bed was cold, but I got undressed and climbed into it again. I refused to think about the completely horrible and mad things that had happened to me in the space of a few hours.

I hit the sack and began slapping sixty. Ten minutes after my inflamed eyelids had closed and the battering-ram rattle the thug-dusts had left in my head had eased away, the phone rang again.

I ignored it the first eight rings, and pulled the covers over. The ninth ring did it. I

sat up, and lit a cigarette. The phone rang ten and eleven. I took a long drag on the cigarette. Twelve, thirteen, fourteen. I finished the weed. Twenty-nine, thirty, thirty-one. I ground it out. The phone stopped, no thirty-six. I laid back down, and went to sleep.

I wasn't disturbed till almost ten o'clock.

Oh happy damned day!

But this time it was the Furies banging on my door. They had stuck a toothpick in the door buzzer, or had a thumb of particularly wonderful pushing power. Plus kicking. Plus banging. Plus yelling, like: "Open up! This is the police!"

So I calmly frantically wildly fast hopped out of the sack, and hit for the front door. I took off the chain and pulled the door open.

At ten in the morning, the face of Goldie Harper, Lieutenant of Homicide, Manhattan West, was nothing to see.

"Man, are you ugly," I said, and turned away.

Goldie came in, slammed the door behind me, and made directly for the kitchen. "What the hell is it *this* time, fuzz?" I snapped. "If it's business, you mooch no coffee from me."

"It's business," he snapped right back, "and I'll take the

coffee anyhow. Unless you want to risk an 'assaulting an officer' charge." I sneered at him with my tongue, got myself all wet, and said to hell with it to myself. He made good coffee anyhow.

I splashed some cold water over my face and the back of my neck, reamed out my Sahara mouth with a dry toothbrush, and went back into the kitchen, barefooted, suddenly afraid Goldie was going to say something about Niles Pfizer.

"What do you know about Niles Pfizer," he started off.

It did just nicely to settle my stomach. Like hell.

He was measuring out the coffee for the top of the brewer, and all I could see was that wide, stooped back. His eyes would have told more—Goldie's always did—but he had them purposely averted. I did not know how much he had. Was he fishing, or did he know for certain?

"Niles Pfizer?" I asked. Surprisingly, my voice was steady and the words came effortlessly. "Why do you ask?"

Goldie clapped the lid on the coffee pot, turned up the gas, and put the bag of coffee back in the ice box. Then he looked at me over his shoulder and grunted.

"Uh-uh."

I looked back innocently. "Uh-uh what?"

"Uh-uh the bull. We know you were there. Probably between five-forty-five and seven o'clock this morning. And by the way—when you get a chance, take a look at that Adonis profile of yours; if I'd doubted you were anywhere this morning, that pan would tell me you were.

"What'd they hit you with? A Mack truck?"

I abruptly felt the pain in my face, where I'd been slug-ged by one of the thugs who was now dust. I could imagine what I looked like, but could not imagine how I'd avoided feeling the rawness before.

"I haven't any idea what the hell you're talking about, Goldie. And if you don't stop playing twenty questions with me, and tell me what the hell you want at this ungodly hour, I'll be forced to—"

"Crap!" he snorted, and turned away. He slid down into a kitchen chair, and thumbed his snapbrim back on his rugged old face. Goldie Harper was one of the veterans, one of the gas-house boys; he knew all there was to know about copping, and who was to be nabbed. He didn't fool easily.

"Okay," I conceded, sitting down beside him, "you tell me

how you knew I'd been up there, and I'll give what I know. Fair exchange and all like that."

He screwed his thick lips into a grimace of annoyance.

I grinned engagingly at his big ugly puss.

"Simple, jerk," he snapped, "you left your prints all over that marble bust."

I didn't answer for a minute. How could I? I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. "*What* marble bust?"

He looked at me as though he was ashamed I'd asked such a question. "Come on, come on, come on, the bust on the model's stand. The one of the woman."

I hesitated again. Something was bad wrong. I remembered that apartment with all the nightmare clarity of an unusually sharp vision. There had been nothing on that model's stand but the blue-holed body of Martita Delgado, quite nude and quite cold. No bust at all.

I had to fake it.

"Oh, yeah, th—uh—*that* bust. I forgot for a minute I'd even touched it."

"What killed Pfizer?" he asked. Coldly.

Game time was over.

I gave him a trumped-up yarn about Pfizer being drunk

and lonely and asking me to come over, and me going over and finding him dead, and going out to get drunk by myself. "I couldn't afford any trouble, having lost my license, Goldie," I finished up. "I knew you'd find him eventually anyhow without my help." Then I asked, tangentially, "How did you uncover him so fast?"

He got up to rescue the coffee that was about to boil over, and brought it back to the table. I got up and took down a pair of cups, some sugar and cream, as he was speaking. "A cleaning woman comes in every morning, very early, to straighten up the mess from the night before. It seems your Pfizer was a ladies' man if ever there lived one. Today the old lady came in and saw him there. You know what killed him?"

The question took me off-guard. I stammered, and he filled in the gap. "No? Well, we don't either. So rest easy."

Since he didn't seem to think I was guilty of anything—at least, that was certainly the way he was *acting*—I decided to go along with him. For some reason I had no intention of telling him about that card, or the two strange things that had occurred up in

Niles Pfizer's apartment: the thugs turning to dust, and the blue glow of the hole drilled through the photographer. But it was obvious he had discovered the body *after* someone had removed Miss Martita Delgado and her ventilated torso, and substituted a marble bust loaded with my fingerprints.

After all the weirdies I had been tossed since last night, I didn't even stop to wonder how they had gotten my prints on the bust. They had done it as easily as they had turned to dust, and that seemed to be that. But—

"I didn't examine him too closely, Goldie, but that wound in his stomach looked pretty odd."

Harper fitted his wide, blocky hands around the coffee cup, till the fingertips interlaced, and looked up over the lip of the cup at me. His eyes were readable as hell. He did not suspect me, but he wanted to know what I knew. *Not a chance of that, Goldie*, I thought. I had to take care of most of this thing myself . . . because of the way Niles had died, and because he had told me about it before he'd conked. And besides, if one man had been brutally murdered just for being *near* the scene of those thugs' operations,

what might they do to Goldie if he started making things hot for them, as I knew he would if I told him what I knew.

Then I wondered for an instant what they'd do to *me*?

"Odd? Yeah, I suppose you could call a hole that goes clean through skin and bone and cartilage neat as a pink-ing shears, and leaves the edges of the wound glassy, odd. I suppose you could. If you was an ass.

"But you aren't an ass, Ray. You're an ex-shamus, and that makes a difference. You aren't used to hitting a deal like this without noticing more than you've told me."

"You think I killed him, Goldie?"

He stared at me levelly, and for a minute I thought he'd answer in the affirmative, just to be a rat. But after a bit he shook his head. "No. I'll accept your story about the call and such. But I know dawned well you're holding out on me. And if you are, Ray, I can make it hot for you."

I shrugged. "Look, Goldie, they took away my ticket because I said the wrong things in print about a city hall bigwig, which are still true—"

He cut in, "—which are still libelous till proved otherwise."

"Okay, okay, till proved

otherwise. But just the same, I'm without status, just a private solitary citizen, and you can't touch me."

"Take the law into your own hands and I'll touch you so hard you'll think the battleship *Missouri* hit you."

"Don't let's get melodramatic, Goldie," I chuckled. "Pfizer was an acquaintance, not a buddy. I went to a couple of his crazy parties and I drank a few beers with him once when he wanted some work done. That was all. We were on first name terms, but I won't put myself in a position to develop a big hole in the tummy like his, just in the sainted name of Niles Pfizer's ghost."

Harper pushed away from the table, and got up. "Okay. The department'll want a statement from you later, so don't develop any illnesses that need faraway climates to cure. We really haven't got anything, but since we know you were there at any rate, you're still suspect number one. Not a very impressive number one, true, but the only one we've got." He walked toward the living room. I followed him.

As he opened the door to leave, I asked, "Goldie, what do you know about a Martita

Delgado. Modelled for Pfizer once in a while."

"Modelled last night, maybe?"

"I asked a simple question. Don't start weaving skeins."

"Never heard of her. Anything to check?"

I nodded. "Yeah, maybe. Maybe you ought to find out where she is. Might help you—and me."

He pursed his thick lips, nodded, and left.

I sat down to think. I was having trouble sorting the real from the fantastic. The affairs of the night before had been compounded, and had involved me all the more, by the apparent disappearance of Martita Delgado, and the in-place-of-her appearance of a marble bust—loaded with sticky prints of one Raymond Francis Lunch, ex-private eye. Me.

So someone had had it hit the apartment after I left, and before Goldie and his hup-squad arrived. That meant I was probably seen leaving—strictly assumption, but I was willing to let it ride as real stuff—and most likely was under surveillance now.

I went to the window and looked out through a corner of the bamboo blinds. The street was full of people as per usual, and no way of telling if

any of them were watching my pad.

I saw one character who was a dead-ringer for Abe Lincoln, standing by the mail box, reading the pick-up time card, and he was taking a long time, but there was no way to peg him as an observer. Oh, what the hell, I was just getting edgy . . .

He straightened up and looked me dead in the eye.

I let the blind slip back, and found a trickle of sweat was coursing its way to my spine's end. This was no peanuts deal, whatever was behind it. An outfit that used a weapon like the blue-blowholer, and could turn its men into tidy puffs of dust—and who had more than four men in the organization to begin with—was nothing to toy with.

But there didn't seem to be anything I could do right then. I was being watched, and I didn't know where to start working, in any event. I went in to get dressed; the card was in my inside jacket pocket. I took it out and looked at it again.

Freidl, 6682 Riverside Drive, GR 2-7390.

I didn't read the block print on the other side. I already knew what it said, and there was a certain creepy feeling I got every time I thought of the

Children of Chaos, whoever or whatever the hell *they* were. And that tagline about the sins of their fathers being heritage, made my flesh shimmy. I was almost afraid to shrug into a jacket, and open the bottom drawer of my bedroom dresser. Afraid, because in that drawer, wrapped in a sealed plastic gun-bag, I had my .32 police special, and I knew if I ripped off the top of that bag, I'd take the revolver, and if I took the revolver, I'd sure as hell go out to find these Children of Chaos, and get them to tell me why and how they'd killed Niles Pfizer and the model. And why they'd tried to frame me.

I wasn't mad, just curious. In a sort of unhealthy, detached way. But I was scared, too—and how.

I ripped off the top of the plastic gun-bag.

It was easy shaking Abe Lincoln.

All I had to do was go out the kitchen window, onto the fire escape, and down it till I reached the level of a hall window in the building facing on the next street, its rear to the rear of my building. I paid token respect to my tail by surveying the alley between buildings, before I slid up the

window and crawled through. Nothing.

I hoisted through and walked down the stairs to the street. It was empty of observers, being one block away, and I hailed a cab from the corner. I gave the cabbie the address, and settled back, willing myself to a non-thinking state, as the hack pulled out into traffic and moved on.

I had the cabbie circle the block twice, when I got up to 6682 Riverside Drive. I took a close look at the building. It was one of those architectural non-entities built in the Thirties, when no one was quite certain what was *chic* and what was *gauche*. Big and only slightly juicy-fruited with scrollwork and knobs on the ledges, it looked gray and clean and solid, as though it had recently been steam-blasted.

Finally, after the cabbie asked me where the hell I thought I was, on a merry-go-round or something, I got out and paid him. I snapped my fingers when I remembered I hadn't checked into the office of the door-to-door brush company I worked for, and made a mental note to call in to tell them I'd be sick for a week or so. Just playing it safe in the eventuality I didn't get killed myself, and might need a job

when I got back to the real world.

I went into the lobby of the building, and stepped past the doorman as though I knew what I was doing, and where I was going. But he had me out-foxed. There were buzzers for each apartment, all right, but the name-plates were empty. I'd have to ask the doorman, or take potluck, ringing half a hundred doorbells till I found the right one.

"Freidl?" I asked him, because he was still staring at me with open curiosity. I did not say Mr. or Miss or Mrs. Freidl, because I hadn't the faintest idea which it might be.

"Can I help you, sir?"

I gawked. The way he said it, I knew for a certainty *he* was Freidl. It was just that way of answering. And I could not stop myself as I asked him: "You're Freidl?"

"That's right, sir." His tones were becoming more curious, more intrigued. Who was this guy, and what did he want? "May I help you?"

I didn't know what the hell to say to him, and half turned away to look for a quick reply elsewhere. Then I noticed the outside phone hung beside the nameplates and buzzers. The phone anyone who would want

to reach Freidl during working hours would have to use. It was GR 2-6800. For a split-instant it didn't register, then it did all at once. GRamercy 2-7390 was the number of the Freidl I was after. So that meant that either this doorman lived in the building himself, which was a coincidence I wouldn't even consider, or there was yet another Freidl at this address.

Covering quickly, I said, "Did a Mr. Brown leave a package for me here. I spoke to him this morning, and he said he would leave it with you. My name is Furman. Do you have a package for me? A manila envelope with—"

He cut me off. "Mr. Brown is away for the week, sir. Are you certain you have the right apartment building?" I had taken a stab at the name Brown, figuring there had to be at least one Brown out of fifty apartments.

"Certainly this is the right place. I knew your name, didn't I?" He was a big man, all shoulders and chest and hard gray eyes.

"Yes, sir," he answered enigmatically, "you *did* know my name."

"Well, then?"

"No, sir, Mr. Brown left no package with me. I'll ring him up if you choose."

"No, that's all right," I backed out of it gracefully. "He must have left before he remembered the package. Well, never mind. Thanks, anyhow." I walked out of there, feeling the doorman's eyes boring two tiny holes in my back.

Once outside, I went around the block, making sure he wasn't trailing me, and found the basement entrance to the building. I went down the stairs, and was in luck. The gate that led through into the rear courtyard and the basement, was open. I saw bits of coal in the court, and figured the coal truck had been here recently, which was why the gate was still open.

I went through, and walked across to the basement door. It, too, stood open and I walked through.

It was dim in the basement, and I found myself in a hallway. Several doors opened on either side, and printed across them were FURNACE ROOM, CUSTODIAN, LAUNDRY ROOM and TRASH ROOM. I tried each door, except the custodian's, and they were all open, revealing inside just what the title outside had indicated. I tried the custodian's door. It swung open as I touched the knob. For a second I hesitated, then remem-

bered how the janitor in my own building was constantly out repairing things, and when he thought he would be gone for a short time only, left his own door unlocked. To be certain, I rang the bell. No one answered.

I went inside and closed the door behind me. A quick search of the place revealed what I'd been hoping to find. A duplicate of the buzzer-board in the lobby. Except this one was the tenant's contact with the janitor, and the name plates had not been removed.

I scanned the board quickly. There it was. 6F. The name was the same, Freidl. After an ear-pressed second against the outer door, I opened up and looked out warily. The way was clear. I stepped out and closed the janitor's door behind me. The elevator stood across the hallway. I pressed the button and a minute later was riding up to the sixth floor. There are more ways to skin a cat than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio—

6F was one of six staring doors. Staring, for each door had a peephole of one-way glass in it. I stopped and gnawed on my lower lip a while. There were several things I'd not bothered to consider, particularly about the

Gargantua named Freidl in the front lobby. It was too damned much coincidence that his name would be the same as that of the person I sought. So there were three possible explanations that rang true. Three possible answers.

One, that he lived upstairs here, either alone or with others of the Children. In that case, the man downstairs was a plant, a front, a guard, and he knew I was after something. That automatically made him a member of the Children of Chaos.

Two, that he had been warned someone might be around looking for this Freidl, and had assumed the name to all strangers asking. The same held true for two as it did for one, in that case, that he was a member of the Children of Chaos.

Third, this was a trap.

I found the last difficult to believe, for no one had known I was coming here. Whoever had gone back to get that card from the body of Martita Delgado, had more than likely *not known* what she had scribbled on the back of it. They had been after the card itself, for nothing else had been touched in the apartment, but I was stumped to know how they could tell the name Freidl was written on the reverse side,

and consequently that I would be coming here in search.

Then I remembered the marble bust with my prints on it, and I realized that someone else had seen my face, and had undoubtedly sent a description of me to anyone who had need for such an outline. So if Big Boy downstairs was one of the Kids—I was mentally referring to the Children of Chaos in that way already—he knew who I was before I opened my yap. Which made number three very, very valid.

He would know I'd get suspicious, and try to get into the building to find the real Freidl. At that point the coincidence of the three unlocked doors struck me between the shoulder-blades.

I've been selling brushes in apartment buildings for nearly a year, since I lost my license, and I'd yet to see three doors so uncommonly unlocked. What I had thought was logical reasons for their unlockedness—the coal truck, the janitor being off repairing—suddenly seemed pallid. Hell, yes, this was a trap.

I wanted to leave right then.

But I knew I'd have to find some answers pretty chop-chop, or give the whole thing up as a failure on my part. The dying faces of Niles Pfizer was behind my eyes,

though, and it wouldn't let me give up. I knew I was a diamond-encrusted ass, but I rang the bell.

I heard the little plate on the other side of the peephole slip up with a soft metallic sound, and knew an eye was glued to the glass, watching me. I'd know in a second if I'd been trapped or outfoxed, or if I'd stumbled on the first link in the chain that would finally wind up by telling me who the Children of Chaos were.

The door opened a sliver on its chain, and a quarter of a head peered around at me.

"Yes?" the quarter asked peremptorily.

"Uh, Freidl?" I asked.

"Do you have an appointment for a reading?" the quarter asked.

Hell, I reasoned. If that was the only way the door would get open, then, "Yes, certainly, I have an appointment."

The chain rattled, the door shut, the chain rattled some more and was slipped off, then the door opened fully. Until then I had half-assumed Freidl was a man. I was wrong.

Freidl was about the sexiest hunk of wench I'd ever ogled. She was a redhead, but not flashy. Auburn with little highlights of bronze and

brown in the red. I couldn't tell what her eyes held, but they were gleaming and honest-looking, her brow was straight and unfurrowed, and she had the cutest little upturned nose I'd ever seen. Her body I couldn't say much about, because she was swathed from neck to feet in a long, shapeless gown completely covered with half moons, stars, abstract astrology symbols, and little portentous signs of the zodiac. I'd hit a star-gazer's joint.

Once inside, and the door locked and chained, my blood started singing in my veins. The song was "Let's Get Away From It All!"

The apartment was decorated the same fashion as her dress. The living room was suffused with a dull rosy glow, from concealed lights that cast heavy shadows across the low ceiling. The blinds were drawn, and appeared to have been drawn since before I was born. An ornate inlaid tile table sat squarely in the center of the living room, squarely in the center of a hand-woven rug with a curious mushroom-shaped design on it. Around the table were four chairs. The room was three-deep in knick-knacks, all of them either of astrological origin, or of Oriental tone.

There were a few crazy things there, too.

A Buddha with its head smashed and a lily in its placid lap dominated one far corner.

A huge vase that rose nearly to the ceiling was filled with what appeared to be mucky, swamp water.

A brace of dueling pistols with ramrods stopping up their barrels hung on one wall, while beneath them, a bared pair of dirks glistened brightly, as though their blades had been rubbed with crimson.

Freidl preceded me into the room, all of which I observed in the space of a few seconds. It was not the sort of room to escape attention.

She moved two of the chairs away from the table, went to a cupboard-like highboy against the far wall, and took out an elaborate, gold-trimmed crystal ball. She sat down with it before her, and nodded me to the seat across.

I sat down and watched her from cautious eyes. She really was a remarkably attractive woman. I would have placed her age at something between twenty-nine and thirty-two. I still could not discern the outlines of what I assumed to be a particularly lush figure, beneath the baggy folds of the seer's gown.

"You have come to me for a reading by whose recommendation?" she asked warily. "I see no record of your appointment in my files."

I didn't quite know what to answer, because since I'd come in, she hadn't consulted any files. Was she getting that hokum from the crystal, or had she merely figured out I was an impostor . . . ? I thought of Freidl No. 1 downstairs. It didn't really matter what his reasons had been for telling me he was Freidl. If he was or if he wasn't, it was a cinch now that he was connected here in some way.

He'd have to be. No one could forget they had someone like this living on the sixth floor.

"Well, I'm, uh, I came to you through a friend," I said heartily, stalling.

"What friend?" she asked, inexorably.

"Uh, well, you may know him under a different name. . . you see, he's quite well known in the business world, and though there's absolutely nothing wrong with coming to an astrologer, he might find it prudent to give you another name."

"What is his name?" she asked again, undeterred.

I dreamed it up fast. "Charles Bowen?" I'm afraid

I had a querulous twitch on the end of it, but she shook her head anyway.

"No such man ever came to me for guidance."

I fished in my side pocket and came up with a fin. I laid it out on the table and said, "Well, in any case, I need a reading most desperately, and I'm willing to pay for—"

She snorted and shoved the fiver back with one finger. She looked at it as though it were Confederate. I assumed she got a lot more than that for a reading.

"I will read you free of charge, Mr. Lunch."

Her smile was deadly, and my face must have whitened out, at mention of my name. She smiled sphynx-like again, and leaned over the crystal.

Her voice deepened beautifully, and she began to intone as though from a vault: "I see a great deal of unhappiness for you, Mr. Lunch. Much, much unhappiness. I see a dead man, and a dead woman, and a marble bust which many in uniform cluck over. I see you fleeing, and I see the mushroom-shaped sign that invisibly rests on your forehead . . ."

I fingered my forehead unknowingly, somehow caught up in her rhetoric. She was

scaring the pants off me, and I think she knew it. But I still had to listen. This mushroom-shaped bit for instance was a new factor. Perhaps there was a factor of explanation for the deaths of Niles and the Delgado girl in what she was about to say.

"I see a group planning, striving, fighting silently to bring life and light to the world. I see a group who have been terribly wronged. A group whose father's sins are their heritage—"

Bingo! She was still talking, telling about his group that was secretly planning to do some crazy thing or other when everybody else was asleep or had their backs turned or somesuch, but I wasn't really listening. She had spouted the same phrase I'd read on that card, as if by rote.

"What do you know about Martita Delgado?" I interrupted.

Her face came up, and the expression was not what I was expecting. If I'd expected her to be startled, she was far from it. That strange grin skimmed across her sensuous lips, and she spat one word, "Karlo!"

I saw a reflection in the crystal, and started to turn just as Big Boy, Freidl No. 1, came at

me with one of his white gloves full of coins. I tried to slip sideways in the chair to escape the blow I could almost feel, but she had had it planned out so damn neat.

The chair had arms. The chair was right up next to the table.

I started to rise, and he hit me across the left cheekbone. The pain paralyzed me all the way down my left side, and I thought sure my face had been split open. I got to my feet somehow, and he hit me again, right behind the ear whammo! I fell forward and started to slip to the floor . . .

I reached out with numbed fingers and my hand tangled in the billowing flow of Freidl's gown.

I don't know what happened after I hit the floor, because I was cold-decked properly, but this I do remember; I heard cloth ripping as I fell past her, and as I slammed into the floor I turned over and got a look at her.

The gown had come away down the front, completely, and I saw what her body looked like.

Beautiful. Neatly and voluptuously-proportioned . . .

. . . and completely covered by a fine down of light blue feathers . . .

I was out like a light.

Man, the hammock was rocking too hard! I was hanging head-down, my arms dangling and swinging loosely, a pressure across the small of my back and something hard in my stomach. My legs were bent down and held against a flat hard surface, and I rocked to and fro. I came awake slowly, with pain, pain, pain, brother, and realized I'd been tossed unceremoniously over someone's broad shoulder.

I tried to twist my head, and caught a bit of a view. A door-man's uniform. I was over Karlo's shoulder, the big ape's fanny. What could I do? I was weak as a three-day-old martini, and my head felt as though someone had played Beat the Cluck with it. I wished most fervently to go hippity-hop back to my miserable existence as a brush salesman. Being bitten by dogs, getting doors slammed on my foot, having housewives slap me and husbands snarl at me, was nothing compared to fooling with these Children of Chaos.

These kids wanted to kill me!

I hung there, head-down, feeling the blood trip-hammering in my temples, and closed my eyes.

We were going down a long flight of stairs. Very long. Much longer than the flights

between floors of Freidle's building. In fact, now that I took a deep whiff, it smelled like the crypt, and damp, and musty.

We kept going down, him walking, me swinging limp and helpless.

Finally I figured I'd had enough. I didn't know what was happening, or where he was intending to take me, but I had a good hunch that the reason I'd been slugged and not killed was that somewhere in my cute curly head I had some info they wanted. Perhaps they suspected I'd talked to Goldie Harper—I was certain now I'd been under their surveillance by the Children since I'd left Pfizer's place—and were going to brain-wash me into telling them what I'd said.

Nuff was nuff. I'd had the course. Framed, beaten, slugged unconscious, this was all of it. I arched my back and kicked out with my legs. I'm not a small man, and I caught that slob right in the crotch. He screamed so loud I thought I was going to be deafened by the echoes that hit up at us from down below. He stumbled against the side of the stairs, and my aching head hit a slippery-wet wall. He stumbled again, down a few stair-levels, and I was able to

toss myself off his shoulder, in front of him.

I hauled back, thinking one solid punch would settle *his* hassenpfeffer, and let it slide out to tag him alongside the jaw.

I must have broken every finger on my left hand. I had heard about glass jaws, iron jaws and granite jaws. But this guy's kisser was composed of solid, 100% molybdenum steel, coated with impregnable, unshatterable, solid diamond. My arm got news of the pain first, and in a second my entire body was quivering, literally quivering with it. He just stumbled about screeching and clutching himself, while I pressed my lips together trying not to join him in the scream-fest.

Kicking had seemed to go the best, so as soon as I got back a little of my control, I kicked him again, as hard as I could. Again in the same spot. This time he just fell backward, and disappeared from sight.

I heard a scream descending, and then he hit. With a bam. I abruptly realized the stair had had a wall on only one side, and the other was open to a great darkness that fell away below the winding staircase. Like in an old

haunted castle, I thought to myself crazily.

Then I started down the stairs at my own pace, full of pain and my gorge rapidly becoming buoyant. More than once I was forced to stop and lean against that cool, slippery wall, my hand to my forehead, the steps whirling beneath me like a hungry vortex. But I kept on down, and it was a long way to go.

The bottom came suddenly, and I looked around for Karlo's body. I found some of it after a while. But one thing about it scared hell out of me. His body was totally gone. Pulped and in slimey runners across the wall and stone flaggings of the floor. But his head lay there staring sightlessly at the ebony vastness overhead, completely undamaged. I don't mean it was attached and unbruised. I mean it was as though his body had been soft and vulnerable, and the head had been constructed from steel, and just set atop the flab body.

For it was cut cleanly at the base of the neck. No broken skin, no open wound, no smashed bone and ripped tissue. Just broken, as a brittle candy bar would be broken.

And staring up at nothing, with dead eyes.

I stooped and touched the

head. It was cold as a steel wall in an Eskimo's summer house. Frozen and dead, Karlo was more terrifying than when alive.

These Children of Chaos were not only deadly, they were freaks.

And that was what started the idea buzzing in my head. That, and the phrase they had used about sins of the fathers. I put it out of my thoughts, and struck out ahead. I hadn't the faintest idea how long I'd been unconscious, or where I was now. Logic told me I must be near Freidl's building, and a bit of assumption reassured me that I was far underground. Ergo almost, I was under Freidl's building. Way beneath.

I wished to hell right then that I'd brought along a flashlight. I patted myself down to see if I'd brought my cigarette lighter, but if I had, it was lost when I'd been thrown over Karlo's shoulder and joggled down those stairs. The only thing I had on me was the .32 Police Special, and for the life of me I couldn't figure why they hadn't taken it off me when I'd been cold. Perhaps because they wanted me out of the way fast. Who knows? At any rate, I had the revolver, and took it out now, holding it tightly, ahead of me, as if it

would remove any obstacles in the deepening darkness. Light had filtered down from somewhere above—not much light, but enough to grope my way—but as I passed out of the filtering less-dark, I found myself wandering down a stone corridor, completely dark and stifling.

I remembered something then, and opened my jacket. I felt for the hidden flap inside the right tail of my jacket, and felt the rigid card still safely hidden there. I closed up my jacket again, because it was chilly in that corridor, and kept walking.

A lot of nothing was down there. For a while.

I was walking, and the gun was out ahead of me, when abruptly, the muzzle went clank and hit something solid. I felt ahead of me, and it was a stone wall, just like the sides of the corridor had been. This wall covered the mouth of the tunnel. I felt along it, and there were no openings, no protruberances, nothing. I was cold against it, and finally gave it a healthy shove. Nothing. It wouldn't budge. Solid as a Krupa paradiddle.

I settled back against the wall, with my badly aching arm held away, and my gun tipped toward the floor. I was

stumped. It was a good two miles back along the corridor and up those stairs. And whatever entrance was at the top of those stairs, was more than likely locked, as this wall was a lock. I was starting to feel real sorry for myself, when I heard a growing whine, right behind me. I put my ear to the cool wall, and it wasn't so cool. It was warm in fact.

The whine was behind it.

That started me running back the way I had come. I trotted back a few dozen yards, and lay flat on the stone flagging.

The whine increased till it was good and loud, and then the rock wall slid up into the ceiling. Just like that. Light spilled out from behind it, and I saw three people standing inside, in a small room. A room? No, not quite. It was an elevator of sorts. There were controls, and as they stepped off the slightly raised platform, they turned to the left wall. Two of them were men, and third was a horsey-looking woman of perhaps forty-five. She walked oddly, with a sort of surging, willowing movement, as though her legs were made of licorice sticks soft from the sun. One of the men wore a dark felt hat, pulled so low over his face I could not see his eyes, and he wore

heavy gloves, though the day was warm, and they did not match in any way what he had on. The third man was as plain and typical as any pedestrian on the street.

The pedestrian tapped the left-side wall in three places which I noted, and at the third tap a section of wall slid back, showering another band of light that crossed the one from the elevator. As they all three filed in, I rose silently and moved along the wall opposite, hugging it and methodically watching for signs of activity from the hole in the wall.

I started violently as the wall slid back into place, and was sent back into darkness as the elevator disappeared simultaneously. The light was cut off when the stone wall slid down into place, and I had to feel for the section of left-side wall without aid of light.

Finally, I found it, and ran my hand over the surface. There were three indentations where it had been tapped, and I repeated the procedure I had seen the pedestrian undergo, in the same exact way. The wall slid back for me. I stood in light, and for an instant shivered, thinking I might be clearly limned, for anyone inside to see. But the light was overhead, and the hundreds or

so people assembled in the huge, mirror-walled auditorium, all had their backs to me. They were seated in modern chairs, in rows, staring up at a platform upon which stood an even *more* modernistic podium.

Behind the podium stood Freidl, her pastel-blue featherhide rustling in a breeze from somewhere. It was not as chilly in the auditorium, and I saw that many of the people had their jackets off, or their coats open.

None of them were normal.

I realized abruptly that the idea I'd had churning within me, coupled with their slogan—sins of our fathers, our heritage—had been quite correct. Everyone there was malformed in some way. Even those who seemed completely natural, gave off a *feeling* of strangeness. They seemed alien, and yet I knew they were human beings.

There was a man with a small head growing from his neck, just under the chin of his natural head. He was conversing softly with the midget head.

A woman in the last row had loosened her dress, and a long, spikey tail lay curled behind her chair, on the floor. Every now and then it twitched spastically.

I saw a one-eyed man. One eye in the center of his forehead. He was sitting on the far left and his three-quarter profile was sufficient to label him a cyclops. I took note that he was one of the three who had just entered; that was the reason he wore his hat so far down over his face—to cover his strange eye.

One woman, far up front, was listening to a beanpole man beside her. His neck was of giraffe-proportions, and he leaned and bent to speak to her. A high-pitched, almost birdlike whistle emanated from her, and she rose straight up from her seat, by beating atrophied wings instead of arms. She settled heavily, the mirth dying from her face, and the stunted wings flapped slowly to her sides. I looked away from them, they were all hideous.

Sins of the fathers—

Mutants.

These, indeed, were the Children of Chaos. The offspring of radiation, of holocaust, of eternity gone berserk. I was torn between two feelings: pity for them in their infirmity, and revulsion at the sight of them. I remembered Karlo, and his jelly body, his steel head; I remembered the three thugs, who had turned to dust; I looked up at

Freidl, magnificent in her soft-lily blue wrapper of feathers.

And I wondered how Martita Delgado, who had been absolutely normal, had gotten in with them.

I slipped behind a pillar that shored up the mirrored ceiling, and strained to catch snatches of conversation from down front. Finally, Freidl banged a gavel, and looking like some sort of bizarre club-woman calling attention, began the meeting. The Children of Chaos were called to order.

"Have we a report from the Agitation Group?" she asked, as an opener. A tall man with arms like ropes stood up, his hairy hawser-appendages swaying freely, and smiled at her.

He must have smiled—she smiled back. She was indeed quite beautiful.

"We have, through one of our membership in Congress, introduced an alarm bill, dealing with fallout. It is sure to be defeated, but the national weeklies and the press will unquestionably pick it up, and the publicity will be widespread. In addition, we have begun a series of riots in Calcutta, Bombay, New Delhi and seven other large Indian cities. Grain riots. We have taken the precaution of contaminat-

ing select doles of this grain, to foment even more unrest."

He handed up a manila folder with a sheaf of notes in it. "A complete report," he explained. He sat down, the tentacle arms swinging lithely.

"Good," she spoke to herself, and lay the folder down on the podium.

A woman with hair like a patchwork quilt rose. Her unruly mop of orange, green, blue, pink and red fluttered about her head like Angel's Hair. She started to speak, but Freidl cut her off.

"We'll have the report of your Assassination Group later, Sylvia, but right now we have something much more important at hand."

She clapped her hands, and two white-jacketed men—as abnormal as the others, with their humped backs and spined heads partially concealed by the jackets—came onto the platform from an alcove to the right. Bearing between them a tall panel of levers and knife-switches, they staggered, slightly making the stairs.

They set the panel down, and immediately set to work untangling the leads and thick bales of wires that ran from the rear of the panel to attachments and sockets at the far right, near the edge of the alcove. In a few moments they

had completed their work, and left by the same route they had come.

Freidl looked at the panel for a long series of moments, then walked back to the podium. She stared down at her audience of malformed admirers, and began speaking lowly, with stark intensity, and a sense of importance—as though history was in her speech, as though history were about to be made.

"None of you here need be told that this is a day for which we have worked and suffered, for many years. None of you need be told this, yet many of you have shown alarm at the publicity and pressure that has come about due to the—ah—removal of Member Delgado."

A heavy-throated rumble stirred through the auditorium at that, and Freidl raised one downy-feathered arm to still the murmur.

"Any one of you knows the secrecy with which we have had to restrict ourselves. No one of us had it any easier than anyone else. The world that gave us birth would destroy us in a moment if they knew we existed. So we have had to hide ourselves.

"Member Delgado was a traitor! She was prepared to

turn us over to the authorities, in exchange for leniency for herself." Then as almost an aside, with revulsion stinging in her words, she added, "But then, she was hardly one of us at all. Seven toes to a foot hardly qualified her to become a member of the Children of Chaos."

I stood there digging all this stuff, and thinking My God what a fantastic thing has been going on right under all our noses. How these strange people had been born—was it *all* as a result of the A-bomb explosions, or was this some after-effect of radiation poisoning; was there a fallout factor working in the air we knew nothing about? I listened to it all, and the .32 Police Special grew warm and sticky in my hand. What a den of hell *this* place was!

"There was no need to use the Polarizer on her! She was still one of us, a Member!" a tiny, thimble-sized man astride a no-eared woman's shoulder bellowed in a voice far too large for his size. "It has frightened Members almost everywhere. Why, I've had cables from Ankara and Buenos Aires that are—"

Freidl cut him off peremptorily, with a mash of her palm on the podium. "Good! Excellent! Fear, that is more

of what we need. We need more fear in each of us, for with that fear in us, when the time comes, we will more easily be able to convey that fear to the Normals!" She spat the last word out as though it were a chunk of ripe persimmon. I stared at her face, all the way across the auditorium. Man, she was a fanatic if there ever breathed one. She was hell-bent on something or other, and with the minutes, I was getting a better idea of what it was.

Without half-trying I knew damned well I was a Normal.

And Miss Freidl did not in any way, shape or form dig Normals.

I had to be Normal. I only had one head and ten toes—properly arranged.

"Our organization is dedicated to the overthrow of Man," she intoned, as though the words were engraved in fire on the inside of her skull. "From the ashes and rubble of this world we will rebuild in our own time and our own way. But this Normal world must die, or we will never be free; free from hiding and free from covering ourselves so that we, too, seem to be Normals."

I thought about that for a second. What a kid with guts

that Martita Delgado would have had to have been. To pose for photographs, with the seven-toe deformity she sported. I was betting no one would ever find a photo of her in her barefeet, though.

"Our campaign has suffered during the past ten years," she went on doggedly, "for though we have had the benefits of more advanced scientific thinking—the effects struck their inventors first, in many cases—we have had to hide and wait and plan in secret.

"But all that is past. Tonight we are at the point of no return. Future historians will speak of this night . . . the night of no return. For Man, and for his Children . . ."

"But Martita was—" the tiny man bellowed anew.

"Martita Delgado was a traitor! She deserved to die! And anyone harboring her sentiments will feel the heat of the Polarizer," she swung her arm out, and it pointed directly toward the furthest alcove in my sight. I edged out just slightly, and took a look. There were three hawk-nosed men back there—and I mean they had noses would have made a real winged hawk blush—and they were holding weapons with bell-muzzles and coils on them that made the

damned things look dangerous. I assumed correctly that these were the Polarizers, and that they were the weapons that had eaten a glowing blue hole through Martita Delgado's pretty head, and Niles Pfizer's belly. What the three thugs had done with the one they had used—the thugs who had turned to dust—I did not know, unless they could turn other things to dust, as easily as themselves. But though they were kamikaze troops of the Children's army, those dust-thugs, I could see no reason why they wouldn't dust me, instead of themselves. So something else must have happened to the Polarizer they had had with them.

There were a lot of little scrappy pieces to this thing that didn't fit, that were left hanging. Perhaps I'd never know the answers to them, because this was a helluva big picture I was trying to see, and there were things that had happened that might never come to light.

But I knew I had to hear what she was saying, and snapped my attention back to the podium.

"So a few of you knew her! So you wish to put the petty affections and attachments of your Normal guises above your true purposes! Well,

after tonight, none of you will worry about the Martita Delgados in our midst. You will stamp them out as ruthlessly as you will kill all Normals.

"Tonight the Children of Chaos rule the world!"

She stepped back to the panel, and her hand went to one knife-switch painted a blood-red. Her feathered fingers rested on the switch, and her eyes glowed with the most ungodly light I've ever seen.

Man, my blood started backing up.

"This switch controls the first of our Polarizer bombs. Few of you have known of this project. So secret was it, that only the men who conceived it, and the few of us in the top echelons of the Children of Chaos were aware of its existence. Over a thousand bombs have been laid during the past year and a half. In every major city, army emplacement, strategic railhead, air center and vital position in the world, a Polarizer bomb rests, waiting merely for *this* . . . !"

Her hand tightened on the switch, and as though the flesh and steel were one, she slammed it home. I heard a sizzle, and a rumble, and then the very earth beneath and above and around us shivered and trembled.

Then through the ground I heard the most terrible squeal of earthly agony imaginable.

I wasn't there, I was below ground, but I've seen News of the Day newsreels of it, and to say it was horrible would be the mass understatement of the century. That bombsite was ripped loose from the Earth. The bomb had been planted far downtown in New York City, in the one spot that could cripple America most effectively.

When she pulled that switch, the miles-wide area of the financial section of Manhattan, went sky-high. It rose up as though on a pillar, with everything staying together for an instant, as that column of earth rose straight up. The city shimmered and wallowed in panic as the financial district went up, up, up, and then exploded. The buildings split at the seams, and the bricks and steel parted. The entire section went ka-bloom, and people and metal and glass and everything that was, went every which way. It rained down over New York for the better part of fifteen minutes; rained down into the two-mile deep crater the explosion had caused.

I knew none of that at the time, for I was still intent on the sounds around me and the

hellfire look in Freidl's eyes.

But later I saw it, and knew that my emotions as it had happened, were accurate. It was a ghastly debacle. Thousands died without a chance. The buildings were miles in the air when they exploded, and anyone living through the explosion itself, would have fallen too far and hit too damned hard to get up and walk away.

No one came out of it alive.

I saw Freidl move her hand to still another knife-switch, and so help me, Hannah, I didn't know what I was doing, but I was racing down one of the aisles toward her, with that puny revolver stuck straight out in front of me, and I let loose with three shots.

One, two, three . . .

And all three missed her cleanly.

One hit the panel, and went right through. A second spanged off the wall behind her flattening out and clinking away on the floor. The third one. I didn't even see go awry.

I got her with the fourth one.

I hit the platform and went right up over it on all fours. I came almost erect, and fired from the hip. The bullet took

her right in the forehead, and spun her around counter-clockwise. She started spilling blood and clutching at her beloved panel, and fell over, carrying it with her.

Then I felt a sizzle go over my right shoulder, and from the corner of my eye I saw the blue blotching bolt of one of those Polarizers as it fired dead-away at me. I dove for the desk, rolled, and came up running again. I snapped off a shot fast, and there was only one guy more surprised than me where it went:

That was the hawk-nosed guy it hit.

He caught the slug high up in the neck—hell, I'd aimed for the belly—and fell back against his two buddies. They were a wild tangle of arms, legs and bird-beaks for a few seconds, and that gave me just the time to do a Red Grange and land in the middle of them. The hit boy was still thrashing about, making life miserable for the other two, and one of them inadvertently pressed the stud or trigger or whateverthehell the Polarizer had, and another blue flash went up through the mirrored ceiling.

Glass came splintered down among the already panicky audience, and they started to bolt. That only made things

the more frantic. Jolly-O! I came up out of the puddle of mutants with one of the Polarizers, and turned it on them.

What a glassy mess. It took two bursts. Clean through, and ruined the floor of the alcove, to boot.

With the side-boys out of the way, I turned back to the main auditorium, and swiveled the Polarizer on the rest of them. It was a long, tube-like weapon, with a button at the rear, easy to press, while I held the pistol-grip stock and the bracing rod up front. Somehow, I didn't have the heart to shoot down those poor winged, double-headed, scaley, twittering monstrosities—even though I knew what they had just done to part of my town, and what they intended to do to my entire race.

I couldn't shoot them; I felt sorry for the poor ugly specimens of humanity. I fired over their heads. It would have been easier if I'd just shot into their midst; not so many would have died.

Because I hit one of the pillars supporting that mirror roof, and the middle of the pillar just went poof, and was gone. The ceiling started to crack, and the cracks ran across the glass, and a second later there were about a million and a half deadly sharp

slivers of glass falling. Needles and spears and stalagmites that fell—and pierced—and killed. I was back in the alcove, safe, and watched it all with a sort of growing horror. It was like watching a bunch of trained animals, or freaks, running around on a treadmill, while their squirrel cage burned around them.

This is the end of the Kids, I thought, half-horrified, half-sorry about it all. It seemed a tragic end.

I was almost right.

I backed up, to avoid any of the glass, for by this time the entire ceiling was going, the other two pillars not strong enough to bear the full weight of that ceiling; I backed into the alcove, and backed again, till I found something hard and tight pressed into the tiny of my back.

"Drop that weapon, Mr. Lunch," a calm, unflurried female voice said. I reached around ever so slow, man, till I felt what was in the small of my back. I dropped the Polarizer.

"You can do a ninety-degree turn," the voice said, and I played Do-As-I-Say so neatly she could have had no argument. I was facing a door. "Open it," she said. I opened it.

It was another one of those elevators.

"In." I got in. She followed right behind, and that little hollow circle that was the muzzle of a .45 stayed right with me. The elevator was dim inside, and she stayed right behind, so I didn't get at good look at her, but she said, "Press the top button." There were twenty-two or -three buttons on the string, and I jabbed the topmost one. The elevator hit for the ceiling and went on through.

We rode in silence for a time, then she said ironically, "Pure, dumb blind luck, Mr. Lunch. You realize that's all you've had, of course."

"Of course," I agreed. Damned if you'd catch me disagreeing with that .45 so handy.

"You happened to find us the night of our largest New York meeting in quite a while. Quite a while, Mr. Lunch. And your blundering ox stupidity has set us back quite a little bit."

"A bit," I agreed, and she jammed the .45 into my small vertebrae, so I decided mocking sarcasm was not in style.

The elevator came to a stop. "Open the door," she instructed me, and like Trilby I obeyed. We were inside a clothes closet. She herded me before

her, and we passed through the sweetest-smelling batch of women's clothes you can imagine, and came out into a lighted bedroom. I looked around and it was a perfectly modern, normal woman's room. A big double bed, a bureau, a bookcase, a portable TV on a stand, and a dressing table with perfumes on the stand, and a big mirror above it on the wall. A big mirror—

I saw her in the mirror—

I also saw me see her, and saw my face go stark, sheet white. I didn't give a damn right then, about the .45 or anything. I was sure I was going insane. I had to look. I spun around and came face to face with the last person in the world I'd thought I'd see.

Martita Delgado.

Alive, very beautiful, and holding a steady, unwavering .45 at my head. I struggled with insanity, and just barely threw it two out of three.

"Y-you!" I blurted, originally.

The smile that crossed her lovely face might have put a Mona Lisa to shame, had she not been tinging it with hatred and something even deadlier.

"Lively for a corpse, aren't I?" she inquired.

I found my tongue was balled up like a little Persian kit-

ten at the back of my throat. It purred gently, then went to sleep. "Oh, stop being so melodramatic, Mr. Lunch," she said, and laid the .45 down on the night table beside the bed. She sat down on the edge of the big double bed, and her skirt tightened across her thighs so neatly, for a split-second I almost forgot she was a member of the Children of Chaos . . . and that she was dead.

"I saw the left half of your head blown away and the edges of the wound turned to glass," I said haltingly. She smiled up at me with her best cover-girl enchanter. I eyed the pistol.

"It isn't loaded," she said. "You can pick it up and try it if you choose. It never was loaded. But I had to get you away from there before you did any more damage. And I didn't want you getting yourself killed.

"They'd have burned you down in another few minutes, as soon as the clods got their bearings and realized they were in no real danger." She was still smiling. She had the damndest pretty cleft in her chin.

"You know I'm going to expose the lot of you, if I ever get the hell out of here alive," I said hard. I was bluffing; I

was certain she wouldn't turn me loose. Was there another gun trained on me? She could not have been fool enough to bring me up here alone without protection.

She seemed to know what I was thinking. She threw one lovely hand out, and then fluffed her rich auburn hair with it. "Look around. We're quite alone," she taunted me. "I wanted to deal with you . . . in private, Mr. Lunch. May I call you Ray?"

"You may call me Mr. Lunch," I snapped back, "and I sure as hell *will* look around."

I looked; she was telling the truth. We were alone. I could have throttled her right then and there, and had done with it. But did I want to? According to the now-dead bird-birl, Freidl, Martita Delgado had been trying to break up this worldwide cult.

"Do you feel like telling me this bit from the beginning?" I asked, nasty despite myself.

"Can't you grasp it by yourself?"

"No, not the fine, shaded points," I replied. She settled back on the bed. Her breasts thrust up against the sheer material of the blouse she wore. I had to remember she had seven toes to each foot; it was the only thing I could

think of about her that didn't appeal.

"We all came out of the blasts," she said.

"Not Hiroshima alone, surely?" I asked.

She shook her head. "No, not just Hiroshima, though you'd be surprised how large the Far East membership of the Children of Chaos is. No, there have been many other blasts, and much change, though few people know about it. It's been going on for almost ten years. Not just in births, but actually in metabolic changes in each of us. Somehow, we began to band together, and then one day we realized we had to get rid of the Normals, before they got rid of us."

"Just like that," I snorted.

"Just," she snorted back. Her eyes flashed determination.

"During the past ten years we have caused many conflicts. The Israeli-Arab war, the Hungarian Uprising, the Argentinian overthrow of Peron. The—"

"The Korean War?" I burst through. She nodded, smugly. I wanted to strangle her right then. I'd lost a whole barracks-full of buddies on Bloody Ridge and the Chosen Reservoir.

"We have caused them, and more. Assassinations, deaths that seemed to be natural, economic crises, we have been bringing the Normal world to the brink of tension and conflict. We were almost ready to strike our final blows tonight. But that meddling little fool Freidl and her glory-hogging!" her voice dripped with malice.

"I have been at the head of the Children for over eight years, and doing quite nicely, thank you, without any of the mutants actually knowing who ran the organization. I was the mind behind the Polarizer bomb plan. Through many of the scientists who were themselves contaminated and—ah—persuaded to help us—Einstein is with us still, you know, he never really died—we set up the bomb system.

"Then Freidl decided she and her group of thugs were going to turn me out, and take over the new world themselves."

She paused, and stretched again. My mouth went dry.

"She trailed me that night to Pfizer's place, and her thugs used the Polarizer on me..."

"I saw you dead..."

"You saw me unregenerated. They killed a section of me. Are you familiar with the at-

tributes of the starfish, Ray?"

"Yeah. And I said you could call me Lunch."

"Yes, certainly, Ray. You know how the starfish can regrow sections of itself that have been damaged. Well, that happens to be *my* particular mutation. The toes are false; I merely used them to insure the others thinking I was like them, and yet not letting them know I was immortal, in essence. I was lying there, starting to regenerate, when Pfizer came in. I heard him calling you, but was still unable to move. Then they came back, to get my card, which Niles had already removed.

"I watched the whole thing. The scuffle between the thugs and Pfizer, their killing of him, your heroic entrance," she said the last humorously, and I could see how it might have seemed to, "and their turning to ashes. We call that breed Dusties, for obvious reasons.

"Then, when you left, with the card, I lay there till I had grown back, and took off after you. Do you recall what bars you hit when you left Pfizer's apartment?"

I couldn't, and shook my head.

"That's because you didn't hit any. You were in your own apartment, under a form

of auto-hypnosis, while I placed your prints across a marble bust I'd brought with me from Niles's apartment. Then I left you and replaced the bust where I had been.

"I certainly didn't expect you to go into action so soon. I was counting on them putting you in jail—at least till we had destroyed most of the world with the Polarizers. I've been looking for you for ten years, Ray."

I was going to ask her what she meant, but she passed over that one very quickly, and went on, "But the police let you roam free, and you went right to that little ass Freidl. She saw in you a threat, the fool, and tried to kill you. I, of course, was unable to interfere, and was thrilled when you showed up at the meeting. What was to have been my triumph, Freidl usurped, and she got what she deserved.

"Now all that is finished, and her faction is dispersed. Those of her group who have not been taken care of already by my own followers, will soon be dispensed with."

So there was trouble within the Kids themselves. That made me happy.

"Now we can go on together. Now that I've found you, and you know what the future

holds in store for us, we can be the King and Queen of the new world . . ."

She would have kept on like that, but I stopped her sharply with, "What the hell are you gibbering about?"

"Haven't you guessed?" she asked. "Don't you know what I've been trying to tell you? Why do you think I haven't had you killed? Why do you think I saved your life downstairs?"

I was stumped and told her so.

"You and I are the same," she cried. "The same. We are both regenerative immortals. Husband and wife in kind."

I boggled. She was insane. "What are you talking about?"

She looked up at me with the sexiest expression I've ever seen on a woman, and launched into it. I was stunned, and just listened to it all without saying a word.

"Why do you think you lost your license? I couldn't have you in a line of work where you might be too badly hurt, or dismembered to regenerate, or where your power would be noticed by others. I trumped up that libel suit, and had your ticket removed. With you as a brush salesman, you were safe, and were held in abeyance till the day of my ruler-

ship came to be. You would still have known nothing of the Children of Chaos, had it not been coincidence that I posed for Pfizer and that Freidl picked the night I was to model for him to attempt her assassination."

"Are you trying to tell me I'm immortal?"

"That's right, Ray. That's right, my darling. Together we can rule the world. The new world that will be ours!"

"A world of monsters and sick minds?" I asked nastily.

Her eyes flashed again, and she said, "It will be a new world. A brave and a fine one. No war, no killing, no hatred—"

"And you're going to found this new world on the ashes of the old, with all the wars and killing and hatred you so despise? Is that it?"

"Ray, don't be like that," she pleaded, and I could see a loneliness swimming in her deep green eyes. I looked at her, and thought it might not be such a bad new world at that.

Then I thought of Pfizer, and the way Martita had looked on that stand in his apartment, all dead and blown away, and Freidl, and the rest of the Kids. It made me so sick, I wanted to die, but she

was reaching up toward me.

She wanted me then, and she was offering not only her immortal self, but the world with it.

I bent toward her, and my arms started around her neck, to embrace her, but they had a life of their own, and the hands struck her windpipe, and the thumbs pressed, and her eyes bugged out and her mouth opened and the scream was cut off, and her tongue bulged till her face grew gray with loss of air, and then . . . in a moment that strung out till eternity, she was dead.

I looked down at her for a moment, and then stumbled out of the room. I could see through a window in the apartment that I was in another section of Freidl's apartment building. A phone swam into sight, and I dialed Manhattan Homicide West. They couldn't get to Goldie Harper right away, but I held on and they rang him up in his prowler car, and after a little bit I told him everything.

Everything but that I was immortal, too.

Oh, I didn't doubt that for a second. She had told me the truth right to the end, with that loneliness of hers—the loneliness only an immortal woman could know—showing; and I told Goldie where to find

the Kids. I knew that now the people had been informed of what was happening, there would be a terrible witch hunt, and the deaths of many innocents—those who merely had large birthmarks, or were slightly deformed—but it would even out in the long run. The human race would be saved, and the Kids would be destroyed.

Homo sapiens would triumph over this new species.

But was it right? Did man deserve to survive over man with his new talents and his new attributes? I didn't know, but it wasn't my problem.

My problem came when I had hung up.

Because I went back to look at her and she was gone. She had regenerated,—as I should have known she would—and she was gone.

So that meant the Children of Chaos were not dead . . . merely chased into hiding, in the beautiful form of Martita Delgado. Now there was only me to go out and find her, wherever she might be, and bring her back, or destroy her. For she was a cancer, a sickness, a bad spot that had to be

cut out. I was the one who had to find her and do it, wherever she might be.

I left the apartment, to begin searching, and only when I had reached the street, did I realize something:

If you—the Normals—are going to be witch-hunting the Kids, you will be hunting me, too. For I am as much one of them in kind, as Martita was. I'm immortal, and nothing can kill me. You will be searching for me, when you are searching for the two-headed man who runs things in Anchorage, or the split-tongued child who is head of the Bolivian Assassination Group, or the fat woman who roams with the circus as a disguise for her activities as the head of the French Children of Chaos movement.

You will be searching for me, too, even as I search for Martita.

And though I don't want the Kids to go on, though I don't want man to be stamped out, still I don't want to die either, and if you come too close, I'll have to fight back.

I'm sorry, but that's the way it is.

THE END



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THE LUNATIC PLANET

By RALPH BURKE

It has been said that only a thin line separates genius and insanity, and the idiot must certainly regard the genius as a madman. But perhaps this point is of no great importance when we consider the opposite: What does the genius really think of the idiot?

THE Terran Colony on Chiron was going to be just what Dane Chandler wanted. He sensed it the instant he stepped off the interstellar liner and set foot on Procyon's fourth planet.

With surprise he noted that the colony was not at all the primitive outpost he had feared it would be; it was a bustling active little globe. That pleased him. Chandler had come to Chiron hoping to find a small, tight group of colonists in which he could create

a niche and where he could feel he really belonged.

He paused uncertainly at the edge of town, watching the busy workers, the hurrying farmers and builders. He sensed a sudden, youthful exuberance, as he drew from all this activity, a feeling of growth and expansion of which he could be a part. A sort of joy arose in him, a warmth.

But it was a joy he had felt before. And going to space had not been the solution then.



The screaming native collapsed under the splintering blow.

or leaving space to return to Terra.

When the liner had blasted off—Chiron was just an insignificant stop on a route which covered a dozen stars—Chandler turned to study the three other prospective colonists who had made the voyage from Terra with him. There was a pretty girl, impatient to join her farmer-husband on the new planet; a short, stocky farmer; a nondescript spacefarer, one of the many who drifted the space-lanes from planet to planet. All three had approached Chandler on the ship when they learned that he, too, was going to Chiron, but Chandler had not been friendly with any of them.

Hornaday, the farmer, turned to Chandler and said proudly, "I'm expecting my brother to meet me at the depot. He's been living on Chiron for five years."

"Really?" said Chandler, looking at the golden-green sky.

"Used to write me about how wonderful and new everything is here. Kept telling me, so I decided to come. We've both been saving for two years for my passage—we did not even write to each other, to save on postage."

"Yes," said Chandler. He had put a year of his space pension into his passage-fee. He took a deep breath. The air smelled good. Chandler realized with a shock that this was probably the first time in his life that really fresh air had ever entered his lungs. First there had been the soup that passed for air on Terra, and then, through the long years in space, the purified but subtly stale air of spaceships. And then, when loneliness had finally driven him from space, the air of Terra again. But here the air was fresh and good.

A short, heavily-tanned, wind-creased man approached the little group of new arrivals. Chandler scanned the newcomer's face and saw that beneath the scars of the elements he bore the same good-natured simple face that belonged to the farmer on his right. The newcomer must be Hornaday's brother, Chandler thought. He was right.

The two men embraced unashamedly. Hornaday picked up his little bag of belongings and, talking excitedly, followed his brother off into the town.

Chandler watched them disappear into the heart of the colony, staring at the two

broad backs side by side. In a few weeks Hornaday would blend with the other colonists. His Terran background would melt and trickle away, and he would be working side by side as a member of the colony. Chandler envied him.

A white-haired colonist, tall and straight and smiling, appeared abruptly at Chandler's elbow. "I'm Kennedy," he said. "You're Dane Chandler?"

Chandler glanced at the other, surprised. "Yes," he said. "Are you the man who's supposed to meet me?"

"That's right. Glad to see you, Chandler. We can use men like you here on Chiron. Come on—I'll show you where you're going to stay."

Kennedy began to walk off in the direction the Hornadays had taken, and Chandler followed him.

"I'm relocation director, among my other jobs," Kennedy explained. "It's my duty to see that all the new arrivals get satisfactorily settled and orientated. Since you don't know anyone on Chiron yet, I've taken the liberty of assigning you a roommate. He's Jeff Burkhart, one of our earliest colonists—came here on the second ship, back in '16—and I think he'll be able to help you get acquainted with the set-up here."

They turned down a long, straight street with small houses on either side of a well-paved road. The street was studded with twisted, red-leaved miniature trees.

"You're a former spaceman, aren't you?"

"That's what my application said. I got tired of the life after a while and quit. I thought space would be the life for me—I don't mind being by myself sometimes—but I couldn't take the emptiness, the loneliness—"

"I know," Kennedy said. "I used to do the Jupiter run."

"You know, then. Two years ago I pensioned out and went back to Terra to settle down."

"You didn't stay on Terra very long," Kennedy observed.

"They didn't want me, and I didn't want them. It worked out very nicely. No one was interested in a spaceman who had spent half his life out of the main stream of things. And it was like living in a beehive, staying on Earth. Twenty million people in this city, thirty million in that one, and I think I knew four people altogether by name. It was worse living in a city of strangers than in space. So I came here. New, small colony. I want to find a place where I belong."

"I see," Kennedy said.

Dane Chandler hoped he had.

"Burkhart's a good man for you," Kennedy went on. "He's a solid individual. One of our best men."

"I'd like to get to meet him," Chandler said. "Hey—what's that?"

A preposterously tall, chalk-white humanoid alien with long clawlike hands and an appearance of great fragility was coming up the street toward him, laughing and crying all at once. When he saw Chandler he clapped his hands and gave a wild roar of laughter, then dashed onward down the street.

"That's one of the natives—the Chirenes."

"Is it drunk, or just plain silly?"

"That native is as sober as you are," Kennedy said, frowning. "He's insane, that's all. They're all like that. It's a planet of total lunatics."

Chandler racked his memory for some fact he might have learned about the natives of Chiron. But there were so many worlds, so many sorts of aliens—he gave up.

"Lunatics? How come?"

"No one knows. They were living a sort of nomadic existence when we got here, and some of them decided to hang around the colony. The rest

vanished somewhere as soon as they spotted us. We've never been able to find them."

Finally they stopped walking, and Kennedy indicated a trim three-room house. "I've assigned you this one. I think you'll like it, and Burkhart ought to be able to handle any questions you may have. Or you can come see me if there's trouble. Everyone knows where I live—just ask anyone."

They entered the house. Burkhart was stretched out on a comfortable-looking foamite sofa, reading. He snapped off the projector and rose to greet Chandler.

"I'm Jeff Burkhart," he said warmly. "You're Dane Chandler, right?"

Chandler nodded. Burkhart was almost as tall as he was—nearly two meters—and had obviously been a powerful man in his youth. Some of his muscle had turned to fat, but he still seemed to be in good shape. He looked to be about sixty, Chandler decided, noting that Burkhart's hair was prematurely gray.

"Glad to meet you, Chandler. Welcome to Chiron, and all such sentiments. Kennedy's probably welcomed the devil out of you by this time. He's good at it."

"I'll let you two get ac-

quainted," Kennedy said, and left, smiling.

With formalities over, the two men confronted each other almost icily for a moment. Chandler determined not to reveal anything until Burkhart did. At last the older man flung himself loosely on the couch.

"You know anyone in the colony, Dane? Got any friends here, I mean?"

"Not a one," Chandler said. "I can't recall having very many friends anywhere, to speak of."

Burkhart smiled faintly, and Chandler realized that he appeared to be inviting pity.

"I don't mean it that way," he snapped. "It's just that I never found time to make friends. I was always alone in space except when I was on Terra, and you know what Terra's like."

"Seven billion people on a planet fit for three. Sure, I know. But we've only got a few thousand here."

"What kind of work do you do?" Burkhart asked. "I'm one of the hiring organizers here."

"I'll start off building, I think. I want to know I've had a hand in building Chiron." He leaned back, stretched out, and did his best to summon an enthusiastic smile.

Burkhart found him a job in a construction project, and Chandler tried conscientiously to become friendly with the men he worked with, but it was no good. The same thing which had driven Dane Chandler into space at the beginning—the feeling that there was a wall between him and the rest of the world—kept him from really getting to know anyone on this new planet. Even Burkhart remarked openly about it.

"I can't figure you out," he said one night at the Entertainment Casino. "I've lived with you three weeks and you are still almost a stranger."

Chandler sipped his drink and said nothing.

"For instance," Burkhart went on, "you went to space. You never really told me why you quit, or where you served. You were lonely, you said, but that's pretty vague. How lonely? Didn't you stop at ports long enough for women to—?"

"Lay off," Chandler said.

Burkhart ordered another drink. "No. I think it's important. Why'd you leave space, really?"

"Space fatigue," Chandler said. "Too many solo trips."

"I see," Burkhart said. "You may think I'm prying—"

"I do."

"I'm just trying to help you."

"Thanks," Chandler said. He gulped the drink and leaned back in his chair. The Casino was filled with laughing colonists, and weaving through the gay crowd like white threads through black were a few of the natives, bizarrely dressed and wild-looking.

"Why don't you ever visit some of the men you work with, Dane?" Burkhart prodded. "I'll bet you don't even know all their names. Do you?"

Suddenly Chandler hated Burkhart.

"There. I'm right. They're just faces to you, instead of people. I think that's your trouble: you've been away from people so much you don't know what they are. If you weren't so wrapped up in yourself all the time, you'd—" Burkhart broke off suddenly. "Watch out, you clumsy idiot!"

A native had come by, and, flailing his arms aimlessly in the air, had knocked Burkhart's drink all over his lap. Infuriated, Burkhart rose and in one swift motion knocked the tall, elongated alien to the floor. Instantly the sound of laughter died away in the Ca-

sino and a hundred pairs of eyes turned to watch.

"You idiots have been in my hair long enough," Burkhart shouted vehemently. "Why don't you learn to stay away from us?" He stared down at the Chirene who lay on the floor, his pale tongue licking in and out of his mouth.

Chandler sensed that Burkhart's rage was mounting within him, and he stood up next to the older man in an attempt at heading off the explosion.

"Sit down, Jeff. The poor animal didn't mean to knock your drink over, after all."

"Shut up," Burkhart said. "This isn't the first time they have done that." He scooped up the alien, holding him by the bunched-up front of his robe. The Chirene's head towered almost a foot over Burkhart's. "You've been going out of your way to bother me, haven't you?" Burkhart demanded.

"Let go of him, Jeff," Chandler said.

"I'll let go of him, all right!" He flung the alien across the room; he crashed into a table and collapsed in a heap, while glass cascaded down, broke, and tinkled.

Chandler drew back his arm and hit Burkhart in the face,

hard. Burkhart sank softly into his seat. A trickle of blood began to wind from the corner of his mouth.

Thank you, someone said.

"You're welcome," Chandler replied automatically.

Then he realized that no voice had broken the stillness that pervaded the Casino.

Thank you. For once someone has defended us from him.

Chandler slowly turned, understanding who had spoken, and looked inquiringly at the grotesque alien. The alien returned his glance, and calmly nodded.

"It *was* telepathy, wasn't it?" Chandler asked after he had finally gotten the cadaver-like alien back to his room and dropped him on the couch. Burkhart had watched coldly as Chandler picked up the Chirene and dragged him out, but had made no move.

The alien's name was Oran, and he was half drunk and half insane. He drooled and laughed and cried and cursed, but gradually began to calm down.

Yes, it was telepathy, said a quiet voice in Chandler's mind.

"I was right," Chandler said.

The alien laughed. Chandler studied him carefully—an ab-

surd, clownlike figure, almost seven feet tall, stretched out at full length, slowly twitching first one limb and then another.

"Your people regard mine as insane," the alien said aloud, slowly. "But *you* are the insane ones. Your people have destroyed ours," he said tonelessly.

"What's that?"

"There are always such undercurrents of hate flowing from your minds. Our only fault was that we could see into them."

The alien closed his eyes and curled up into a fetal ball. Chandler waited patiently, and at last he uncurled.

"I haven't been this coherent in years," the Chirene remarked. "My people—why do you radiate all this curiosity?—my people lived here before yours came to colonize. We never needed to speak out loud—always in the mind, as I did to thank you. Then you came and destroyed us. We looked into your minds—we couldn't help it—and our minds were blasted by the horror and hatred we saw in yours. We went insane."

Chandler sat down heavily. The Chirene struggled to his feet and tried feebly to leave, but Chandler concentrated on controlling the alien mentally,

and succeeded. He subsided.

"You're the first who knows we have the *sorn* sense. We lived in the closest mental rapport, sharing every thought and every emotion. And the first Terrans landed and came forward to greet us, and we extended our minds to them as is our custom, and we looked in, and the pit of filth that lay at the bottom of their minds swept us down. But I'm talking too much. Let me go, please."

The alien pulled himself to a sitting position again.

Wait, Oran, Chandler ordered.

"You're too strong for me," the alien said. "I feel the pressure of your mind on mine, and I'm not strong enough to resist. You Terrans are all alike."

"Is this true—about what happened to your people?"

"I'm not a Terran, Chandler. I can tell only truth."

"Were they all—all of them destroyed?"

Oran hesitated. "Were they?" Chandler repeated.

"No," Oran said. "Some fled to the desert and hid there. No Terran will ever find out where."

Suddenly the alien paled almost to a bright white. Chandler realized that the Chirene had picked up his thought

even before he had let it rise from his subconscious.

No. I won't take you there. I can't!

Oran turned away and began to sob convulsively. Chandler wandered up and down the room, while the picture slowly began to form in his mind—the picture he knew the alien must have constructed long before it had shaken into place in the cruder mind of the Terran.

Point one: telepathy existed.

Point two: the aliens were unable to bear the proximity of presumably filth-ridden Terran minds.

Point three: a telepathic Dane Chandler would be one who at last would be no longer isolated from his fellow men.

Point four: if—

I wish you had let me lie on the Casino floor. Yes, your guess is right. Telepathy can be induced in humans.

Chandler paused and stood still as the alien's mind crackled out the thought. The final piece of the jigsaw puzzle clicked neatly into place and he turned to face the sobbing, miserable Chirene.

You'll take me to the hidden Chirenes, Oran, Chandler's mind said. It was Chandler's most powerful need, the need

to associate and blend with other men, the one factor that had always been missing from his personal equation. Now the solution was in his grasp. Relentlessly he let his mind pound against the helpless, already-weakened mind of the alien. *You'll take me there, Oran.*

It was a command rather than a question.

After a long silence Oran answered, out loud. "You Terrans never satisfy yourselves. You've destroyed a wonderful civilization and now you're going for the remnant of it. All right. I can't defend against your mind. I'll lead you to my people. You've made me sell out my race. All right, Chandler; get your things together and let's go—*Terran!*"

The last word was an explosive spitting thought that ripped into Chandler's brain. He looked grimly at Oran, and tried to let his mind beg forgiveness.

The Chironian desert was wide and flat, with clumps of thick vegetation holding down the sand dunes. Oran set a merciless pace through the yellow sands, and Chandler followed, not speaking and trying not to think. The tall figure of the alien bobbed constantly in front of him. Chan-

dlar winced at the realization that he was grinding the last speck of self-respect out of the Chirene, but he saw himself approaching the end of a weary quest.

For as far as he could see, there was desert. It looked the same all around, except for the dark patch far behind him which marked the end of the desert and the beginning of the verdant land where the Terran colony was situated.

As dusk began to settle and the strange purple Chironian twilight covered the land, Chandler realized that the alien could very easily be leading him in circles, waiting for his food to run out.

"Are we heading in the right direction, Oran?" he asked, breaking a silence that had endured for almost twelve hours.

The stinging response came: *Am I a Terran?*

Stung by the rebuke, Chandler looked away and began silently to make camp for the evening. They settled and awaited the night.

Chandler lay awake for hours, dreaming of the hidden city that was somewhere ahead, and planning. Oran, next to him, seemed to be in deep slumber.

Finally, Chandler dozed off. After what seemed like hardly

any elapsed time, he awoke brusquely to the sound of wild laughter.

He needed a moment to adjust to wakefulness. Then he peered into the darkness and saw the figure of Oran, dashing off through the Chironian night.

Oran, he telepathed desperately. Come back!

But the alien kept running. Chandler watched him go, helplessly. There was no use trying to pursue the long-legged alien.

I cannot face my people. The sudden thought reached Chandler like a cry drifting on the winds. Oran continued running until he faded from sight as if hidden behind a curtain of black. Chandler stood staring into the night for a while, and then sat down on the shifting sand and awaited the coming of dawn.

When Procyon rose to bring morning, Chandler surveyed the situation. Somewhere ahead of him was the hidden city of the Chirenes. Behind him was the Terran colony. He would have to take his chances with the desert, he decided, and keep going.

He headed through the trackless sands, mind fixed firmly on the unknown destination ahead. The sun rose

higher and higher in the sky, and he cursed Oran more and more as it grew hotter. Frequently he turned to make sure the Terran colony still lay behind him. It would never do to wander for days only to blunder foolishly back to the colony without having found anything.

A great green bird leaped from the clinging shubbery as he tramped through it, and, uttering angry squawks, headed for the sun. Chandler continued through the long afternoon, stopping occasionally to empty the gritty sand from his boots.

For the hundredth time he checked the colony, now just a speck on the horizon. Then he moved forward. The sun was oppressively hot now, and sweat was trickling down his back. There was nothing in sight but rolling dunes and low shrubs. The silence roared in his ears.

Chandler began to feel that Oran had tricked him after all and left him to die in the desert. But there could be no turning back now. He moved ahead.

Go no further. Halt and return.

The thought struck him in the forehead and held him for a moment, and the suddenness of it brought a flash of fear

racing down the back of his legs.

"Who said that?" he asked aloud.

Then he passed a hand across his eyes to clear away the sweat, and silently answer his own question.

Don't go any further, Dane Chandler. We cannot bear your presence.

"Who are you?" said Chandler.

You needn't pretend, Chandler. You know who we are. We have watched you closely since you first encountered Oran.

"You know what I want, don't you?"

The sorn sense is not for Terrans, Chandler. Go back and let us mourn alone.

"I'll decide that," Chandler said. He took a tentative step forward. There was no resistance. The ghost of a suspicion wandered through his mind.

Yes, came the confirmation. We cannot prevent you from approaching. We ask you—as between civilized beings—to go back and not expose us to your mind.

Chandler kept moving, placing one foot carefully in front of the other. He could feel the mental voice of the aliens growing desperate.

"You know what I want," he repeated.

Do you really want telepathy, Chandler? Do you really want to be able to look at the minds of your brothers? We have already seen them. We know what lies beneath their surfaces.

Chandler stared at the bright glinting of the sun on the hot sands. "Yes. I want it. And I'll leave you in peace if you'll give it to me."

He took another step forward.

We have no choice, said the silent voice, and there was a note of pain in it. We cannot bear the nearness of your mind any longer. We will show you how to realize your latent extra-sensory powers, and then leave us.

Chandler quivered. "I'm ready," he said.

Open your mind to us.

Chandler relaxed, closing his eyes, and let their minds flow through his, feeling them rising and swelling in a celestial symphony in perfect harmony. Their minds bathed his, explored his, beat upon his. He sank to his knees in the sand.

Suddenly perception burst upon him as if an explosion had blasted away scales from his eyes. Their minds were open to his.

It was one great mind composed of individual members,

blending and merging to form a unity. A sense of being in the presence of a divinity washed over him and left him breathless.

Then it was over. As suddenly as it had begun, it ended. Their minds closed to him. The weight of that rejection bowed him lower in the sand.

Go. We have kept our word. Go back and look at your brothers.

"Can't I stay here with you?" Chandler finally asked.

It would destroy us. You have what you want. Go.

He nodded to the invisible aliens somewhere before him in the desert. The thought of the colony and all its people came to him.

"Right. I'll go."

His head throbbed and pounded as he about-faced. The speck that was the Terran colony was hidden by the afternoon shadows, but he felt the presence of Terran minds in the distance, and he set out across the desert to reach them, to join them, to offer them the gift he bore.

As he approached the colony a vague uneasiness began to wander through his mind, growing slowly until it became a definite feeling of fear. The colony loomed up before him and he strode toward it, won-

dering who he would encounter first.

It was Kennedy. The white-haired relocation director smiled and waved when he saw him. Chandler held his powers in check as best he could, waiting for the moment to let them free.

"I've been looking for you, Dane," Kennedy said. "Jeff Burkhart told me you had some sort of fight with him, and I want to smooth things over if I can. We don't want any of that on this world—we want to get away from fighting here, Dane."

Chandler held his mind frozen. "I've been away," he said, ignoring Kennedy's words. "Something's happened to me."

He let down the bars and his mind opened up, enfolding Kennedy and all the other minds within reach of his. There was a moment of awareness, and then Chandler fell to the ground, writhing in agony.

"What's wrong?" Kennedy bent hurriedly to examine him. Chandler buried his face in the ground and wrapped his arms around his head to shut out the thoughts that beat against his brain. Kennedy lifted Chandler as if he were a baby.

Chandler peered into the

bottom of Kennedy's mind, allowed his own mind to see through the windows of the other's eyes and into his brain. He yelled, broke loose, and dashed off heading for the desert.

When he was far enough from the colony he threw himself down on a sand dune and tried to collect himself.

Looking into Kennedy's mind had been like crawling through a pit of worms. On the surface Kennedy was a respected member of the community, a leader of men, a righteous and honest man. But under the coating of virtue lay a nest of hatreds, fears, pain-memories, with twisted dreams and evil schemes, coiling and uncoiling like imprisoned vipers trying to break loose.

And Kennedy was considered a good man.

Chandler could see now why Oran considered his life over, why the remaining sane Chirenes had retreated to the desert. Whatever it was (that lurked below the surface of the Terran mind, it was not something which could be looked upon safely.

Chandler saw his fate clearly: he would have to resign from humanity. -

You asked for it, a voice said. The sorn sense was your greatest desire. Was it pleas-

ant, the mind of your brother?

"Let me come to you," Chandler pleaded. "You did this to me."

You were responsible for everything. Now face it.

Chandler scooped up a handful of sand and whirled it through the air. "But I'm worse off than ever. Now I'm neither man nor Chirene. Let me come to you."

We would if we were able, Chandler, the Chirenes replied. We are not vindictive. But our safety must come before yours. Your mind is deadly to us.

Chandler began suddenly to run across the sand toward the hidden city.

Stop.

"No!"

Now that you have the sorn sense, we have a power over you that we did not have before. We ask you not to come closer to us. You carry a plague in your mind.

"You can't stop me," Chandler shouted defiantly. "You can't just shut me out."

We can.

They unleashed a bolt of thought that slapped Chandler to his knees. He rocked dizzily, tried to withstand it, failed and fell.

Your mind is now open to ours. We can wipe it clean and

eliminate the danger of your existence.

"No," Chandler said. Defeated, he sat up dazedly, rubbed his forehead, and slowly crawled away across the sand. The massed Chirene mind gradually withdrew its pressure until he was completely alone.

He stood by himself in the desert for a while, thinking. The Chirenes had cut him off, walled him up, cast him loose. They neither could nor would have anything to do with him.

And as for the Terrans?

He let his mind rove gingerly over the desert toward the colony, and, feeling only a mild revulsion but none of the horror produced by close contact, examined the thoughts of the Terrans much as he might study a drugged scorpion. No, there could be no return.

He wandered off in the desert, exploring the colony with his mind and, despite all, exulting a little in his power to project himself across miles into the minds of others. The emptiness of the desert sang to him.

He sensed an unfamiliar mental voice. Another. Two more. He probed a little deeper and found that they were new colonists landing. Chandler examined them detachedly. Farmers, young wives, all

with the festering grimness in the heart of their minds.

Chandler had the greatest power known to the human mind. But it cut him off from humanity forever. Angrily, he kicked up some sand.

Perhaps, he thought, somewhere on Chirene there was a mind he could reach and touch and know without recoiling.

There must be one, he thought.

No. Not even one, came the reply.

I thought you weren't listening to me any more, Chandler said. *I thought you had let me go.*

Your thought broke through our barrier.

There is one, Chandler said. *There must be someone whose mind I can know.*

Then look for him, the Chirenes said, and withdrew.

"I'll live in the desert," Chandler said out loud. He thought of Terra with its teeming billions, and of the emptiness of space. "One by one I'll sound out their minds, looking, looking at the inner thoughts, the thoughts beneath the thoughts. There must be one. If not now, then later. I'll find him."

He extended a probing beam of thought, entered the mind of Jeff Burkhart, withdrew, found the mind of the farmer

Hornaday, and withdrew again. They were not the ones.

Chandler squinted and saw a figure approaching him across the desert, waving to him as he trotted over the sand. It was Kennedy, Chandler saw. He turned, ignoring him, and started off deeper into the desert to begin his lonely vigil. He examined and

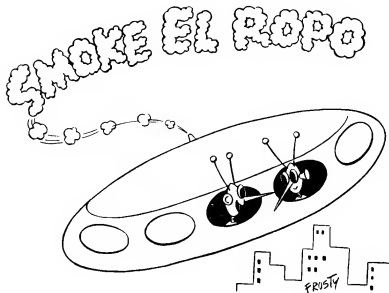
discarded, examined and withdrew, looking, looking, as he headed for the heart of the desert.

Someday, somewhere, there would be an answer. He knew that, as he knew he was alive.

In the meantime, Chandler was alone—alone, with his terrible power.

More alone than he had ever been before.

THE END



"It's nice we can make a little spending money while here on Earth!"

A man likes to have his accomplishments recognized. He likes to be acclaimed for his successes. So it was mighty frustrating to Tom Travis when he couldn't bring back a single scrap of evidence to prove his—

Ready-Made Nightmare

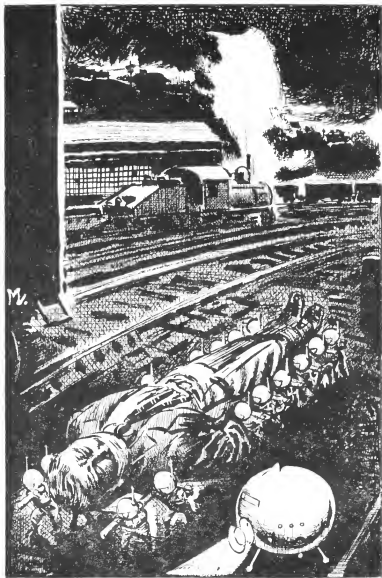
By
BILL
MAJESKI

A SHARP headache and a fuzzy tongue. A dull buzzing in your ears and blurry vision. Flashing pain when you open your eyes and the light from the window cuts you like a knife. You moan and duck back under the covers. A night of drinking does that to you. A night of good, solid drinking did that to Tom Travis too. It left him with the fierce thirst and the shaking hand and the empty, growling stomach. But it was

old stuff to Tom. Hangovers had become a part of his existence, as much a part as drinking bourbon at Leo's until they sent him home.

You wake up with a feeling of insecurity, as if you've been cheated of something. Cheated of a few moments of your life when your senses leave and then come back and go away and then come back fully only after a sleep, a sound sleep induced by the alcohol.

But there was something



Cramming the prisoner into the tiny space ship
would be quite a trick.

else troubling Tom this morning. Something other than a hangover. He didn't know what it was, but when he first opened his eyes the uneasiness came over him. It was a heavy uncomfortable feeling.

He struggled to a sitting position and his feet searched until they found his slippers. He fumbled into his robe and got to his feet. The dizziness hit him and he sank back to the bed, holding his head. Then he shook it to clear it and tried again. He made it this time. Oh, that thirst. That aching thirst. He wanted to drink water from the cold tap until he couldn't hold any more. But that water would run right through you and make you feel weaker than ever. He edged his way slowly toward the refrigerator and cautiously reached in for the tomato juice. He put the container to his lips and drained it without taking it away. When it was empty he put it down and took a deep breath. There was no instant rejuvenation. There never is. If someone invented an instant rejuvenator he'd be a millionaire overnight. Hangovers take time. Tom Travis knew this better than most men and he didn't expect any miracles from the tomato juice. But at

least it was a step in the right direction.

Something stirred in his brain and dug inside. It unnerved him, unsettled him. It was something he had seen. Something he had seen last night when he left Woody's and with the luck that drunks have, found his way through town, across the tracks and down the main thoroughfare to his door.

He went to the window and opened it. He took three deep breaths and closed it quickly as the air cut into his deadened lungs. He sat back on the bed. It would take time before he got the strength necessary to get dressed and down some breakfast. The ticking of the clock suddenly grew loud in his ears and he placed it face down inside his bureau drawer.

It was exactly noon, but Tom had no place to go. He had been fired. Again. The fourth time in a year. Too much drink. It's all a matter of degree. Everyone drinks. Some drink a little. Some drink a lot. Some drink too much and can't stop. That was Tom. He gritted his teeth as a shudder passed through his body. Then he struggled into his clothes.

He checked the wallet which

stuck out from his pants pocket. He flipped through the bills. Still had \$350. Plenty of drinks there. He had been lucky. Could easily have been rolled. So many drunks are. But the money was all there. \$350 iron men. Iron men. Men. That was it. Tom shook again. Those damn men. Those little men he had seen running through the freight yards when he came by this morning.

What were they doing in the freight yards? And why were they so small? And so many of them. He heard his voice now, calling to them a friendly greeting. He offered to buy them a drink. That was it. And they had run off. They were fooling around with something on the train tracks and he had scared them off. Now he remembered. He had trotted drunkenly after them hoping they'd come back to join him in another drink.

And they were so damn small. Three feet if that. Certainly no more. Like a pack of midgets. Why did they run off? Were they scared? What would anyone be doing fooling around at the railroad tracks in the early morning?

Tom got to his feet and started downstairs. At least he ate after a binge. None of that liquor before breakfast for

him. At least not yet. He had not slipped to that stage. Maybe he would. How do you know when you're weak? You never know what you'll do next. Never know how far you'll slip. He sucked in a breathful of fresh air and started for Al's.

Al's was crowded with office workers grabbing a quick bite and rushing back to work, rushing against a clock that told them when they were late and passed the word along to the boss. The clock on the wall ran the lives of the workers. Routine had bothered Tom. He couldn't take it. Even in the Army. And later. One job after another. A fine football player in college, he never could be worried about training or obeying curfew. He just wasn't made for routine. And since the rest of the world was run on routine, Tom was an outrider. He found his solace in alcohol. He knew it was wrong, but he knew that this life based on routine was wrong. And he couldn't do anything about either one.

He sat down and gave his order to a short waiter. The man reminded him of the little men he had seen the night before, running and scampering clumsily away from him when he lurched upon the scene.

Who were they? The country was living in a scared climate. There had been several attacks from strange satellites. A man killed mysteriously at a munitions plant, a reservoir dynamited. Nothing big. Harrassment attacks they called them. Like a bunch of guerillas getting in their dirty work, causing a bit of trouble each time, but soon it mounts up and everyone is frightened. It's the hysteria of war without the release of feeling and emotion that goes with all-out fighting; a gradual weakening.

His bacon and eggs came and he started on them. He cautioned himself not to eat too fast. If he did it would knock hell out of his stomach and he might be sick. He found he didn't enjoy it as much as he had anticipated. Something was bothering him and now he knew what it was. Those damn little men. Could they be . . . ?

He gulped down the food in spite of himself and hurried out. He went over to Leo's bar where he had been the night before. Leo greeted him casually, in a very friendly manner, for Tom was a good drinker, steady and quiet. He never caused trouble.

"You're looking pretty good, old friend," he said, as

he wiped off some glasses. "What will it be?"

"Just a beer." Tom waited as Leo played the taps and watched the foam and the fluid swirl into his glass. He looked into the glass for a second before sipping. "I guess I was pretty high last night," he began slowly.

Leo shrugged. "Not much higher than usual. So what?"

"Nothing." Could he confide in Leo about this. He decided to. "Leo, something funny happened to me last night. I mean this morning. I was walking through the railroad yards, you know, the short-cut to my place and I saw a bunch of men fooling around near the tracks."

"Hobos," said Leo with finality. "They are always there."

"These were short men. All three feet tall."

"Maybe the circus is in town," Leo said with a smile.

"No. These guys were just short. I don't think they were dwarfs. These were built just right, you know. And when I came close to them and called, they just ran off into the darkness and I lost them."

Tom looked at Leo. The bartender was eyeing him quite strangely.

"Well," said Leo hesitantly, "maybe you just . . . well, you

know at night you can't see very well and it could be that . . ."

"Look, Leo, I was drunk last night, but not that drunk." Tom took another sip. "Or was I? No, I saw these guys."

A young thin man with a sallow face came over to Tom's elbow. Tom had seen the fellow in there every night. He was also a fairly constant patron of Leo's.

"Look," the fellow began, "lots of guys see those little men. I do it myself. The first time it happened to me I got worried. But then I decided that, what the hell, if you drink, once in a while you see little men. Forget it. Have a beer."

"No, that's not it. I'm sure it's not."

"How come you're so sure?"

"It seemed so real. I called to them. I remembered it very clearly."

"That's the way it is with me," said the little man. "Have a beer."

Leo set up another beer and Tom started in on it. Tom felt Leo's eyes looking at him. He thought he detected a note of pity in them. Maybe the stuff was getting him. But no, dammit, it was too realistic. He had seen those men. He downed the beer quickly, said so long and went out.

He walked three blocks west and went into the police station. A huge pair of shoulders with a head in between were stationed behind a high desk. The stern face made Tom even more hesitant about telling the story. But he had to. It could be important.

"What'll it be, bub?" said the man behind the desk. Tom noted the man was a sergeant.

"If you've got a few minutes, Sergeant, I'd like to tell you something. You can take it for what it's worth."

Tom went through the whole story for him.

The sergeant listened very thoughtfully, scratching his chin with his giant hand at regular intervals. When Tom finished he spoke up.

"You been drinking? I mean last night, before all this happened."

"Yes. Some."

"How much? A lot?"

"Quite a lot. But, so help me, this is true."

"Look, buddie, you look like a nice clean-cut guy. But we get stories like that every day. Somebody sees elephants, another guy snakes, one man called us and said he saw a bunch of monsters carrying ray guns and said they were going to destroy the whole country if we didn't rush right out to his house." Then he

looked at Tom more closely. "Ever been in jail for drinking?"

Tom nodded. "Been in jail. Not for drinking. Bunch of friends got noisy. I was with them. They took me in too."

"Were you drunk then?"

"Yeah. I was drunk. But I wasn't noisy or troublesome. I just happened to be there."

"Yeah. Well, forget it. But I'd advise you to go home and get some sleep and lay off the stuff. And if you don't someday those stinking little men of yours are going to crawl right through your bedroom window and start jumping up and down on your head. That's what one guy told us once. Said they carried little spears and they chased him all over the room."

"I see," Tom said with a sigh of disgust. "Okay. Sorry for taking up your time."

He walked out into the warm sunshine. Maybe the sergeant was right. Maybe the little men were creations of his alcoholic stupor.

He climbed the stairs to his small apartment. He opened the door and flopped across the bed. He felt weak from the exertion and the excitement brought about by the retelling of last night's strange occurrence. He opened a bottle and poured himself a drink.

The fiery fluid brought him back to reality.

Tom pulled down the shade and fell back on the bed. He closed his eyes and tried to sleep. It wouldn't come. He rolled and tossed and thought about last night. Maybe a cold shower would pick him up.

He went inside and doused himself under the freezing needles of water that hit his skin with great force. He stayed under the steady stream until he was shivering. Then he dried himself and got dressed in fresh clothes. He turned the radio on for some soft music. It soothed him, made him feel better. It made him forget he had seen little men. Almost made him forget, that is. Was alcohol finally getting him? He read about things like this. Could it happen to him. He was a well-built, strong man of 35 who never got sick, who had been bounced around a bit, but always could come back. Could he stop drinking if he wanted to?

It was almost eight o'clock and the twilight was slowly turning into darkness. Lights flickered on in the apartments across the way and the noise from the business place below him began to flare up into the summer night.

The soothing music had stopped and an announcer was giving the starting lineups for the baseball game. Tom sat and stared and thought about himself. A thirst consumed him and he took a glass of water. It didn't help, a beer would. He opened a can and sipped it, sitting at the window, watching the people go by, listening to the sounds of the night.

At 9:30 he began to get hungry again. There was nothing left in the refrigerator. By now it was dark out. There were lights in all the windows across the street and the street below was a row of neon and glaring white lights. He looked across to the east, where the railroad tracks were. Where he had seen the little men last night. Little men. He smiled. It sounded ridiculous when he said it. He got to his feet and went downstairs to Al's.

It was 10:30 when he finished putting away a huge meal. It made him feel fine. Besides, the heavy food gave him a good foundation for the liquor he would consume at Leo's, or wherever else he went to. He decided he would go to the Blue Swan, a small place with a band at the foot of the street. He started that way but when he passed the

alleyway which led across the tracks and through the railroad yards he paused. He stopped for a minute. Maybe there were little men. What better time to find out than right now. With a firm step he ducked into the alley.

He reached the tracks at the end of the alleyway, about 500 feet north of the end of the platform. The cut-through where he had seen the men was another quarter of a mile north. It was only about four blocks from the main street but it was like another world, dark and silent, except when the trains ran through. And that wasn't very often. He walked on, getting farther and farther from the lights and nearer and nearer to blackness, illuminated only by an occasional dim, red light by the side of the tracks.

Tom felt himself shake. It wasn't fear, but apprehension, he decided. Doing this while sober was a lot more frightening than stumbling through it while drunk. He slowed as he neared the spot where the little men had gathered last night. Tom turned and looked back. He was alone. The noises from the street were barely audible. The glow of the neon didn't shed any light where he was standing.

He crossed a track almost

gingerly. He had heard about third rails and though he did not quite know what they were, he was always careful about them. Except when he was drunk, and then his luck carried him. If he only had a flashlight, Tom thought. But then, he didn't know he was coming here.

With a great deal of care and caution he crossed another track and stopped to take his bearings. Therew ere six lines of track. If he remembered correctly the men were gathered around something at the far line, where most of the trains came in. He picked his way across the tracks. He had no idea what he would find. He hoped it would be something to prove to the police and Leo and himself that alcohol wasn't beating him, that he wasn't having the delirium tremens, or the D.T.'s as they called it.

He reached the spot on the sixth row of tracks. He bent over and squinted, moving along slowly. Then his eyes picked up the outline of something rectangular. His ears picked up a steady ticking sound. A bomb? No, it couldn't be. He reached down for it. Something exploded on the back of his head and blackness engulfed him.

Tom's eyes opened but he

closed them again quickly. A sharp glare pained him. The pain in his head told him he had another hangover. But how? When did he drink? He shook his head to clear it. The pain was too local to be a product of a hangover. He tried to move his legs but couldn't. His hands were paralyzed too. Sweat poured suddenly from him as fear swept over him. Then he opened his eyes completely. He was tied, bound hand and foot with heavy rope.

And there standing at his feet, a smirk on his face was a man. A little man, about three feet tall. He was standing with his hands on his hips, glaring at Tom. He had on a bright blue suit.

"Boy, am I glad to see you," Tom said. "You know before this happened I thought I was on my way to a rest home for the cure, or a drunk tank at City Hospital. I don't know who you are or what you are, but you took a heck of a load off my mind." He smiled. "If I had a bottle right now I'd offer you a belt to help me celebrate." Then he looked at his feet as the expression on the little man's face remained unchanged. "But what are these ropes for?"

"To keep you under control,"

said the midget in a peculiar, high voice.

A vague recollection of a story he had read long ago about a man who wandered into a land of small people and had gotten himself tied up came back to Tom. *Gulliver's Travels*, or something like that.

"What do you want?" Tom asked.)

"Not you. But we have you, and we're stuck with you. Do you like rocket traveling?"

"Look," said Tom, "I'm not going anywhere. Rocket or no. I'm getting out of here." Then he looked around. "Where are we, anyway."

The door opened and another midget came in. He was exactly the same size and appearance as the one standing guard over Tom. "We'll be taking off in ten minutes. Have everything ready."

The guard turned to Tom. "We are in an abandoned coal chute, just a couple hundred feet from the tracks. We built this set-up ourselves. It took us some time but it's worth it. A nice operating base. We have a neat set-up. Rocket launch, junior-size rocket, of course, built especially for us, sleeping quarters, everything."

"Tell me more," said Tom,

getting a bit more accustomed to it now.

"I'd like to, but you'll find out when you get to our place."

"Your place?"

"Right. Jason No. 1. Ever heard of it?"

"No. And I'm not going anywhere. I like it here."

"So do we," the little man said. "That's why we're here. We're going to take over Earth some day. Not soon, but some day. It's cold as a witch's nose on Jason No. 1. We like your climate essentially. We don't like excessive cruelty, but we do apply force to necessitate expediency in carrying out our work-a-day plans."

"What will you do with me in Jason No. 1, or whatever the place is?"

The little man spread his hands. "No idea. We radioed up and they said to bring you back."

"You know, when I first saw you I was glad, but now I'm not sure. I think you really mean it."

"Let me assure you that we do."

"Why me? I have no money, no rich relatives. You can't hold me for ransom. Why me?"

"I follow orders. I'm only a captain. The chief gives the orders. He tells somebody,

who tells somebody else and eventually it gets to me."

"Routine, just like on Earth, eh?" Tom smiled. "Okay, but I'll be damned if you're going to take me away."

"Don't worry about that." He snapped his fingers and three more little men came into the room. They surrounded Tom and began tugging at him and pushing him.

"Knock it off," Tom shouted.

"Be quiet, or we'll have to use force."

The men shoved and pushed Tom who was struggling as best he could with his hands and legs tied very tightly. The captain had grabbed Tom's legs and they were dragging him, slowly but surely, toward the door. Tom kicked and thrashed but he couldn't slow his progress. When he got to the door he tried to catch his upper arm on the side of the door, but a well-placed kick from one of his captors fixed that.

Tom cursed softly and tried again. His muscles, weak from inactivity, hurt as he tried to break his bonds. But it was no use. They had tied him very securely.

He raised his head and caught a glimpse of a silvery object. It looked like a very

large silver basketball. There was a door in the side.

"How you going to get me in that thing?" Tom asked, still trying to halt his steady movement toward the shining big ball.

The question stopped the captain. "Hold it," he said. "That is a problem. But not one that we can't overcome. I think it's just a matter of the proper bending and folding and we'll be able to squeeze you in. Okay, on with it, men."

Tom continued to slide slowly toward the door. By now one of the little men was holding it open.

Tom felt the sweat run off him in tiny rivulets. Then he felt something move on the back of his hands which were rubbing against the floor. The ropes seemed to be moving. The combination of the perspiration and the sliding against the floor seemed to be loosening the ropes. Tom stopped struggling and concentrated on the ropes on his hands. He manœvered them into position to take full advantage of his bumpy, jerky trip across the hard floor. Finally, a hand came free. But he was only a foot from the door. He manipulated the other rope with his free hand. His feet were on the threshold of the doorway of the big sil-

ver ball when he brought his both hands around, knocking one of the men to the floor.

"Now, you little jerks, I'm going to knock the hell out of all of you and take you in myself." He swung hard and another man went down.

The captain and the other midget were on him in a flash. Tom got his hands under the captain and flung him backward. The other man got a good grip on Tom's neck and refused to let go. Tom fought his way to his knees to get more leverage into his powerful punches.

The little man was wrapped around his neck like a scarf. Tom got his hands under the little man's and forced them apart. Then he ducked and sent the little man flying over his head into the side of the round rocket.

Tom got to his feet, still bound together tightly. One of the men came in low and held fast to Tom's knees. Tom started to waver and began to topple. He broke his fall with hands and pushed himself to his knees again, taking his right hand and grinding the man's face to the floor.

He turned around in time to see the captain reaching for a weapon in his belt. He hopped over like a huge rabbit and hit the captain quickly and vi-

ciously on the neck. The captain fell down and the gun tumbled to the floor. A little man leaped for it. Tom bent low and whistled an uppercut against him which sent him flying.

The one remaining midget made a leap for the gun and managed to get a good grip on it before Tom's hands clamped around the man's body. Tom squeezed with every bit of strength he had left. The man moaned and the gun dropped again to the floor. He picked up the little man and shook him and then threw him down.

He looked around. Four of them were stretched out cold. Suddenly he sank to his knees. For a guy out of shape and in very poor condition for any sort of vigorous exercise, he felt he had done all right. But now a wave of nausea swept over him.

Tom heard a sharp click and a light footstep from behind him. He turned to see another small man. The one who had gone outside to stand watch. Tom forced himself upright. He saw the terror in the small man's eyes. Tom leaped forward, bouncing on bound feet, toward the little man who reached for his gun. Tom threw himself forward as the gun went off.

He heard something zing

past his ear and then grabbed the little man around the shoulders and drew back his hand. The little man twisted free and brought the gun down on the back of Tom's hand. Tom was thrown sideways and the man broke loose. Tom reached out a hand and caught him again. The man banged the gun against Tom and fought to free himself. Tom held tight and they swung around as if dancing a furious dance. They whirled out into the room where Tom had been held a prisoner.

With a sudden jerk, he sent the man flying and leaped toward him. The man sidestepped and whacked Tom again with the gun. Tom toppled over and pitched face downward to the floor. With all his effort he turned to see his opponent race toward the other room, locking the heavy door behind him. Tom was unable to make any motion after him.

Tom tried to get to his feet. He couldn't make it. He crawled forward, a foot at a time. Then he slumped and lay there. He heard scrambling and eager voices and suddenly a whoosh and a roar. Then silence.

A long time afterward he woke up. He felt the bruises on his face and head, the hurt

and the stiffness in his bones and muscles.

His stiff fingers worked at the ropes on his feet until he at last succeeded in freeing his legs. He stood up shakily. He held onto the wall to steady himself. He bent his knees a few times. They hurt, but not the killing pain. He took a deep breath and went to the heavy door which the little man had run through. It was locked. He pushed against it. It didn't move.

With a last look around, Tom walked slowly toward the door on the other side of the room and walked out into the black night, filling his lungs with summer air.

Yes, he was still at the railroad yards. The lights from the platform were there in the distance and there was still some neon glow from the business section. He walked slowly, unsteadily toward the lights. He wanted to tell the police about this. Now they had to believe him. And more than that, he wanted a drink. He felt he had earned it. Who knows how much trouble and how many lives he had saved the country. That was a bomb he had taken from the tracks. Couldn't have been anything else.

Suddenly another thought struck him. Was the bomb still

there? He turned around and went back to the tracks. He searched for the approximate spot the bomb had been in when he was attacked and carried away. He walked up and down the tracks, crouching, listening for the ominous ticking. He kept going, up and down, until he was satisfied that there was no bomb.

"What happened to your face?" asked Leo when Tom came in. The thin man with the sallow face came over to listen in.

"Give me a bourbon, Leo," said Tom. "Listen, remember those little men I told you about? Well, I saw them

again. I just got done fighting them."

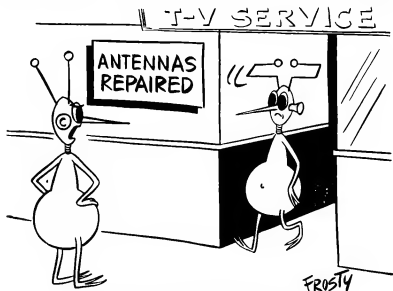
"Sure," said Leo.

The thin man gave him a sympathetic look. "I fight them myself once in a while."

The thin man nodded and Leo put the drink in front of Tom.

"Now look, what's wrong with you. I SAW THESE LITTLE MEN!" Several others in the place turned toward Tom. Tom looked at Leo and at the little man. They seemed embarrassed for him. Tom belted his bourbon and sighed heavily.

"Better make it a double bourbon," he said. **THE END**



"I warned you against going in there!"

THE LADY HAD WINGS

By DARIUS JOHN GRANGER

Did you ever find an angel lying dead in the snow? Few people have, so that's what made Logan's experience unique. Then other "angels" equipped with blasters, arrived on the scene. That made it interesting. Until Logan couldn't figure out where his loyalty belonged—with his friends or his enemies.

LOGAN found the corpse about a mile from the spaceship.

It was the body of a young woman with wings, great pinions folded slackly in death now, dead eyes staring sightlessly, the whites covered with snow—the mouth opened and filled with snow also.

The body was quite naked and had been beautiful. It was hard and cold now with winter in the world. There was ice in the folds of the dead wings.

The snow fell softly, steadily, slow windless flakes shrouding the world with white from the flat rock-strewn plain where Logan and Taggart had brought their spaceship down to the high mountains which Logan could no longer see because of the snow.

Logan prodded the corpse and turned it over. It was stiff as wood.

The winged girl had not surprised Logan, for Taggart, who had been here before and



The raging bird women demanded a life for a life
—a death for a death.

who had brought Logan with him across interstellar space, had told him of the women-like eagles. What surprised Logan was the dead girl's back. She had been shot from behind with a blaster: her entire spine was gone and one of the wings had been all but sheared away. There were two blasters on this world of eagles. One was buckled about Logan's waist. Taggart, who had left the spaceship a dozen hours before and whom Logan had come looking for, had the other.

There was a sudden rushing of air. Logan straightened, looked up. He saw a flutter of great dark wings in the snow overhead. Two girls swooped down, hair streaming, wings flapping slowly now, snowflakes like diamonds in the feathers.

It happened so quickly that Logan did not think to struggle. The wings beat and the girls swooped and a hand grabbed each of Logan's arms near the armpits. Then the wings fanned more rapidly, the feathers beating at Logan's head and shoulders, and slowly he was borne aloft. It was too late to resist as soon as his feet left the snow-covered ground. He blinked and felt a giddy sweeping motion

and looked down. The ground was far below. If he struggled they might drop him, and he would die.

The wings beat, the girls did not speak, and Logan felt the snow falling on his face. He fumbled with the dials of the thinkspeaker under his mackinaw and said:

"I didn't do that. I didn't do that."

Telepathically the thinkspeaker would make his words clear to the winged girls, but they flew on, great wings beating, and ignored him. The flat snow-covered land below gave way to stands of evergreens mantled with snow and ice. The ground rose, separated into hills. They flew with Logan into the high mountain country, where it was colder.

Hours later they landed high in the mountains.

From the air Logan had not been able to see the small village. The dome-shaped houses had looked like snow-mounds, the streets were obscured under a shroud of snow, there were no people about. But when his two captors brought Logan down with a flutter of wings, people appeared as if by magic. The women all had wings folded behind them on their backs as they walked. The men were wingless. All

wore cloaks to protect them from the snow and cold, and nothing else. They muttered and jabbered in a language Logan did not understand. They looked at Logan with hatred and he said:

"Listen, you don't think I did that, do you?" This time he remembered to adjust his thinkspeaker to receive and one of the girls who had brought him in accused:

"The girl you killed was cousin to the Princess Nalia. Why did you kill her, Taggart?"

"I'm not Taggart," Logan said, and saw an older woman with wings like old leather and parchment-like dugs exposed under her snowcloak nod her head.

"This is not Taggart," she said, "although he wears clothing like that which Taggart wore when Taggart came here last."

Logan thought: Taggart must have killed the girl, all right. It had to be either Logan or Taggart, and Logan knew he hadn't done it. But why? Why? When Taggart hadn't returned to the spaceship, Logan had gone out looking for him. He hardly knew this man Taggart, a big, hard silent man of forty or so, although they had shipped out together when Taggart had

found Logan down-and-out on an outworld a dozen light years from this world of eagles. Taggart had mentioned a treasure which would make the eyes pop and offered twenty-five percent as Logan's share, if Logan went with him. It did not seem strange to Logan: piloting a spaceship across interstellar space was not a one-man job; he would be earning his keep. So they had come straight to this world of eagles and Taggart had gone out alone and murdered, apparently, the first winged girl he saw. It didn't make sense.

There was a stirring in the crowd and a beating of wings overhead. Logan looked up and saw a girl come swooping down, soaring, her wings outstretched and not beating now. She alighted with a little run and folded the great dark wings behind her. They were attached near the shoulder-blades, Logan noticed. No, attached was the wrong word. They grew there.

"Nalia," someone said. "The Princess Nalia."

The winged woman bowed, because they were Nalia's equals in sex but not in rank or position. The men stood their ground. Logan sensed a reversal of the sex-roles here. The wings would be responsi-

ble for that. If this was a hunting village, and by the skins and sides of meat hanging between the dome-shaped houses Logan guessed that it was, the women—with their wings—would be dominant.

"Why, this isn't Harry Taggart," Nalia said in surprise. Wings or not, this Nalia was quite the loveliest girl Logan had ever seen. Her long hair was raven-wing black, as were her own wings, folded in repose now, their arcs above the level of her head and their hanging tips touching the ground. Her wonderfully curved body was white and almost with the purity of white marble, her limbs were long, her bare breasts high and firm. Logan stared and her face and throat reddened and her wings fluttered. Flying, she had worn no cloak. But she partially opened the great pinions now and cloaked her body with them. The Princess Nalia. . . .

The wings were encrusted with ice. Long slivers of ice fell to the snow as the wings unfolded. Nalia said, to no one in particular, "The flying season is almost over. My wings iced dangerously."

"Yes, I know," one of the girls who had brought Logan in said.

"This is the one?" Nalia asked, indicating Logan. "But it is not Taggart."

"We found him over the body of your cousin Lelala. We surprised him there."

"I didn't kill her," Logan said. "I had no reason to kill her."

Nalia's eyebrows lifted. "Then did Taggart?"

"I don't know," Logan said truthfully enough.

"Why did you come to Walwine?"

Logan's thoughts raced. He was a prisoner. Tell them the truth? That they'd come for treasure? Or that they were merely explorers? But Taggart had come to Walwine before. . . .

"Taggart mentioned treasure," Logan said.

Nalia strode forward angrily, came very close to Logan and stood there glaring at him, so close he could see the pores in her almost flawless skin. "A death for a death," she said coldly. "That is our law. Did it ever occur to you that this treasure you wanted might be sacred—to us?"

Logan shook his head.

"Well, never mind. We have only your word that you didn't kill Lelala. When the skyship was seen we assumed it would be Taggart because Taggart had been here before and had

seen the treasure and said he would return."

"We should have killed him then, when we had the chance," the old woman said.

Nalia shook her head. "There was not reason. A death for a death . . ."

". . . and a life for a life," singsonged the old woman, apparently reciting the second part of a Walwinian commandment.

"Life for life," said Nalia. "Logan, you did not do this?"

He was startled at her use of his name, and his face showed it. "How—" he began.

"Your name? I delved into your mind for it. I'm sorry."

"Delved?"

"Why, of course. Even Walwinian men can do that. But, no matter. Logan, have I permission to delve more deeply into your mind?"

"Why?" he said.

"To learn—what must be learned."

He nodded slowly and the crowd was instantly silent, expectant. Nalia shut her eyes and all at once Logan felt an indescribably beautiful sensation enveloping his entire being. He saw Nalia in front of him swaying. She would have fallen, but two women ran forward swiftly and caught her. There was a dazzling ra-

diance in Logan, colors new to the spectrum, and the sound of weirdly beautiful music, notes from no scale known on Earth. Logan felt giddy suddenly with desire and a delightful latitude. Almost until the very end of the spell—which did not last more than a moment or two—Logan did not realize what had caused it. Then, even as the spell left, he knew; some incorporeal part of Nalia had left Nalia and entered Logan.

The girl stood up, fluttered her wings, opened her eyes. "You did not kill her," she said. Her voice was soft. She looked troubled. "Logan," she said, and repeated his name again: "Logan."

The crowd stirred, whispered. "The other?" the old woman said.

Nalia answered: "This one does not know."

The snow fell, on huts, on trees, on wings.

Nalia said: "Logan, find Taggart for us."

He said nothing immediately. A death for a death, they had proclaimed. Taggart's death—for the slain girl's? But Taggart was an Earthman. Could Logan deliver him to them, even if he had killed the girl? Wasn't a man's first duty to his own kind? He looked into the eyes of Nalia and

felt—what? Love? he thought incredulously. Is that what you feel? But he had not spoken a hundred words with the girl. He knew nothing about her. Yet some part of her deepest soul had entered his and it was so utterly beautiful in every sense of the word that it left him almost breathless. And did the girl, this Princess of Eagles, feel anything of the same for Logan?

"Well?" demanded the old hag.

Nalia said, "Give him time, Luloc. Would you deliver your own to a tribe across the hills?"

The old woman Luloc muttered and was silent.

Logan said: "If Taggart is innocent?"

"I can find that out," Nalia said, "as I discovered your own innocence. But don't delude yourself, Logan. Can he—possibly—be innocent?"

"Did he leave weapons here last time?" Logan asked. "A weapon like this?" He removed the blaster from his belt.

There was a cry of alarm behind Nalia as two girls rushed forward, their wings beating but their feet remaining on the ground; their faces furious because they thought Logan had drawn the blaster to use it. They came at him

swiftly, wings beating at his shoulders and head, arms blurring in swift movement through the snow. Logan stepped back, his right arm suddenly aching at the elbow joint. One of the girls had his blaster.

"You see?" Luloc cackled. "This is your innocent man."

"He was only asking—" Nalia began.

"Fool!" Luloc squawked, sounding all at once almost birdlike. "Because a handsome man says—"

Nalia slapped her face and the older woman stumbled back. The crowd muttered and their muttering was angry.

"You'll have to find Taggart for us now, Logan," Nalia said. "You have no choice."

"If I refuse?"

Luloc cackled and crowed: "A death for a death, yes! Refuse! Oh, why don't you refuse?" Luloc's shriveled wings fluttered in anticipation.

The Princess Nalia, Logan thought. It's incredible, but I love her. How can I deny my love? Of course, I have only seen her this once, but something of her entered my mind, my soul, and I have been closer to her than a man may get to a woman in fifty years. . . . Or, he thought suddenly, was it a trick? Perhaps, entering his

mind, she had made him feel this? Perhaps with it she knew he would find Taggart for them. How could he know which. . . ?

And Taggart. He had nothing against Taggart. Taggart was an Earthman, like himself, far across the galaxy, ten thousand light years from home. If Earthmen didn't stick together . . . hadn't their very clannishness made their swift expansion across the startrails of space almost to the starclouds of Sagittarius a possibility?

"Well, Logan?" Nalia said.

Slowly Logan shook his head. Love? he thought. Or a trick? He couldn't fight Taggart for them, one of his own kind. "I can't do it," he said.

Nalia stiffened as if he had struck her. The crowd muttered. The girl with Logan's blaster brandished it and Luloc croaked: "A death for a death!" But Nalia said coldly: "Wait. Keep him hostage. I will find Taggart."

Luloc demanded: "But where will you look, child—Princess?"

Nalia answered at once. "He has come back for the treasure, hasn't he? Won't he come to the Shrine after it? I will seek him at the Shrine."

"Then take warriors with you," Luloc said, and several

winged girls stepped forward eagerly. "Don't go alone."

But Nalia shook her head. "Alone is better," she told the older woman. "If Taggart killed once, he will kill again. I was only a child when he came last time, but already I have the sceptre of power. It was I who decreed he should live. So it is my responsibility."

Disappointed, the winged warriors stepped back into rank. Nalia did not look again at Logan. Her wings fluttered and she took three running strides and lifted into the air. A cold wind had swept up. It was very much colder now than when the two winged girls had taken Logan, although no more than a few hours had passed. Logan looked up and saw Nalia circle overhead in the snow. Then the circles became erratic; the girl was in trouble. She came down slowly, then more swiftly. Her wings seemed stiff.

"The ice!" someone cried in horror.

"The cold! It is too cold to fly!"

They stood horrified as Nalia plummeted down. It was Logan who broke free of the circle around him and rushed across the snow-covered ground to where Nalia was falling. He stood there near a little bank of snow, waiting

for her, his arms outstretched, his legs tensed, to break her fall if he could. The iced wings fluttered stiffly and then Nalia struck him heavily and they both fell into the snowbank.

Logan got up unsteadily. "Are you—all right?" he gasped.

He helped Nalia to her feet. Her eyes blinked, focused on him. "You saved my life," she said. "Why? Why?"

Luloc and some of the warrior-maids came to them. "A trick, to deceive you," said Luloc promptly. "So you won't hunt down Taggart."

"I am going to the Shrine," Nalia said.

"You can't fly now, can you?" Logan asked her.

"It isn't that far. I'll go on foot."

"But on foot you'd be no match for Taggart," Logan said.

"Nevertheless," Nalia said.

"And without a weapon?"

Nalia shrugged. "We hunt animals with spear and bow, not men."

It was glorious—and ridiculous. Idealistic, yes. But alone against an armed Taggart—and probably a killer Taggart—what chance did Nalia have, a slim lovely girl naked but for the snowcloak she put on now, her wings useless?

Logan watched her go, walking boldly, unafraid, into the snow. She would walk a little way and then fly a little way, her ice-stiffened wings awkward but propelling her swiftly through the air for a score of yards or so, just above the ground. She made very good time and was quickly lost to sight.

Suddenly Logan began to run. She couldn't go alone. Taggart had killed before. Taggart would kill her too. . . .

He heard a beating of wings behind him. Three warrior-maids came at him from behind, their feet skimming the snow. They bore him to the cold snow in a flurry of wings and something struck the back of his head and as he lost consciousness he was vaguely aware of being carried back to the village.

Nalia, he thought. Nalia . . .

He awoke, his head throbbing with pain. It was very warm. He was within one of the huts. He got up, his head beating. He stumbled to the doorway and peered outside. The light was dim now. Night was coming.

Hours had passed. Hours, while Nalia went to find Taggart—and death.

Luloc stood in the doorway. "Ah, ah!" she cackled. "Don't

try to escape now. A death for a death. . . ."

"Where's Nalia?"

"At the Shrine for the other killer, Taggart."

"I've got to go to her!"

"To help your friend Taggart?"

"No. To save Nalia. Don't you understand? Don't you see?"

Luloc cackled and fingered the dagger at her waist-girdle. For a moment Logan wondered why they had let an old woman guard him, but then he remembered Luloc's hatred and understood. The hate would be an additional guardian.

Beyond Luloc's cloak-covered body was gathering darkness, down-falling snow, silence. Logan abruptly tugged at her arm, pulled her into the hut. The hanging fell over the doorway. Luloc squawked. Her withered hand with surprising strength and incredible speed broke clear of Logan's grip and flashed down for the knife. It came up, the blade long and deadly-looking. She struck out with it at Logan.

He parried the blow, forcing the blade away from him. His fingers closed on the crone's wrist. The knife fell. He held his hand over Luloc's fanged mouth so she couldn't

scream out. Her shriveled wings beat at his face but he grabbed her throat and her eyes glared at him in hate and fear. "I'll kill you," he said, "I'll kill you. Unless you tell me how to find the Shrine."

The wid eyes glared.

"Listen, I'll let go of your mouth. Then tell me. If you scream out, I'll strangle you."

Cautiously, he lifted his hand. Luloc sobbed at the air which his strangling hand had almost denied her. He was ready to clamp his hand over her mouth again if she screamed.

"The ridgeline," she gasped. "Follow the ridgeline to its highest point and you will find a cave. There you will find the Shrine. . . ."

Logan, holding her wrist and dragging her along with him, went to the doorway and pulled down the hanging. He tore it swiftly into strips and bound Luloc, hand and foot, shoving a strip into her mouth too, and binding it there. Then, with her knife, he slipped outside.

He took three steps and a girl appeared before him in the snow. Logan was ready for a yell or a wing-fluttering attack, ready for anything but what she did. She beat her wings and hovered three feet off the ground and kicked him

in the face. Logan fell and rolled over in the snow. Wings beating, the girl swooped down, but Logan flung himself to one side and got up swiftly. When the winged girl got up after him he struck the point of her jaw swiftly and expertly, knowing he had to because Nalia's life was at stake. She fell without a sound and Logan, clutching Luloc's knife, plodded through the snow toward the ridgeline.

He reached ridge-height two hours later in a swirling snowstorm and a fierce wind and absolute darkness. He was amazed that he had been able to come this far. He had half-walked, half-crawled along the slippery, ice-covered ridge, with a drop to unknown depths on one side and a beetling cliff on the other. When he felt his feet going downhill in the darkness, he knew he was at the top of the ridge. He groped along the cliff and suddenly his hands encountered nothing. He stumbled blindly into the cave and instantly the wind and the driven snow was behind him. It was absolutely dark, absolutely . . . no! There was a faint glow up ahead. He walked along, collided with a wall and turned with it. The glow was brighter, much brighter.

He heard a cry. Nalia!

He ran then, heedless of the fact that Taggart was up there ahead somewhere, armed with a blaster. Nalia cried out again.

Then Logan burst into a dazzlingly lit room. A great fire glowed moltenly in a cauldron at its center. Above the fire at the far end of the cavern was an enormous idol, twice lifesize, of a winged woman. It was pure gold—Taggart's treasure. Solid gold, that size, Logan thought—a fortune.

Between the cauldron and the idol was a ledge of rock. On it Taggart was slowly forcing Nalia back toward the cauldron of fire. Apparently she had surprised him, had closed with him before he could use his blaster. But wouldn't the fire have melted the ice on her wings? Wouldn't she be able to fly, then, and be a match for Taggart? It wasn't warm in the cave, Logan realized. It was icy cold, windless but colder than it was outside on the ridge. Water dripped from the ceiling above the cauldron and Logan knew then. It was an ice cave and the fire barely warmed it at all. Nalia's wings were still useless, or all but useless . . .

Taggart forced her back toward the cauldron. Neither of

them had seen Logan as yet. He began to sprint across the floor, slipped on ice, skidded helplessly to the lip of the cauldron, but miraculously did not go over. Then he was climbing ice-steps toward the ledge and the idol beyond it and the two struggling figures.

Nalia's wings fluttered weakly. Her hands beat at Taggart's face and he said, his voice thick with hate: "Yes, I killed her. I knew you'd never let me get the idol, I knew we wouldn't have a chance if she went back to the village saying she'd seen me. She had to die."

And Nalia—Nalia had to die too. Logan ran across the treacherous ice . . .

"Logan!" cried Taggart. "Man, am I glad to see you! This wildcat . . . give me a hand . . ."

Logan ran to them. Taggart clubbed Nalia's jaw brutally and the girl fell toward the cauldron. Logan rushed up the final step and caught her, easing her down on the ice.

"You fool," said Taggart. "Don't you see, she has to die."

"And me?" Logan asked in contempt. "What about me? Why share the treasure with me, if you're willing to kill them for it?"

Taggart understood then.

His hand clawed down for the blaster which Nalia had prevented him from grasping. He got it, raised it and fired as Logan leaped at him. Logan felt raw energy sear the cold air above his head, then closed with the big man. They struggled across the ice, skidded together, fell. Taggart brought his knee up, digging for Logan's groin. Logan twisted his leg and the knee dug into the muscle of his thigh. Then Taggart clubbed at him with the blaster and it struck Logan's temple, dazing him. He fell away from the big man, but kicked out with his legs as Taggart brought up the blaster a second time. The beam of energy seared up at the ceiling and chunks of ice fell into the flames.

Then Taggart fell across Logan, pinning him to the ice, reaching for his throat with big, powerful hands. The fingers closed there. Logan gasped, couldn't breathe. The world fled swiftly from his senses but he thought of Nalia. Nalia, unconscious on the ice. Helpless. After his death, Nalia's.

He struck out at the face above him with his hands. He tore at the cheeks, the ears, the mouth. Blood splattered down on him, but there was a roaring in his ears as Tag-

gart's fingers closed inexorably on his windpipe—

He struck again, clung to loose flesh, pulled. Taggart screamed. Flesh near his jaw, his entire lower lip, hung loose. His hands released Logan's throat, and they both stood up, panting. Taggart swung wildly, his left fist, his right, his left again . . .

Logan ducked in under them and hit him once in the face. Taggart stumbled back, slipping on the ice. He reached the edge of the ice ledge and stood there teetering a moment, then, with an incredulous look on his face, went over into the cauldron of flames. He screamed and disappeared there.

Gasping for breath, Logan crawled to Nalia. She was sitting up, her eyelids fluttering. "You came," she said. "You came for me. To save me . . ."

"I—hardly know you," Logan said. "But I love you. I love you."

Nalia kissed the bruises on his face. "I entered your mind," she said, her tears flowing. "I—loved what I found there. But you had to act. You had to show me. You had to show Luloc, and the others. Oh, Logan . . ." She pressed closer to him.

"You'll come back to Earth with me?" Logan asked. "I don't want the treasure. I've found what I want."

"You stay here with me on Walwine. We'll rule together."

Logan didn't answer. Either or both, he thought. They'd work it out.

Soon the winged warriors came, with Luloc. At first the old woman glared at him balefully. But Nalia and Logan were found locked in each other's arms and smiling dreamily into each other's faces, and when Nalia told them what had happened, even Luloc's wrath faded.

THE END

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PITCH OUT

By KENNETH SPAULDING

The next time you go to a baseball game, watch the pitcher very carefully. He may not even be there. He may be trying to win a game in another world.

I AM not one of the vast majority of Americans who think Wysniewski will hit 65 homers next year, nor do I think Borden of the Phillies will pitch 30 wins. Nor am I possessed of that wild urge most American males have at about five-thirty to rush out and get the late-score extras. Baseball can be relegated to Limbo and I wouldn't bother asking what leagues play there.

But comes the first week in October and my editor gives me the bad news. Sports wants my services, and would I oblige? Well, you could say no, and go back to the divorce courts if you want to . . . Me? I just never can get up the courage to say I want to.

Ed Marcy's the sports editor of the *Herald-Times*. It's

Ed's opinion all other sports are something to fill the pages with only until baseball lifts its hydra-leagued head in the winter training months. Then ho to the palm trees and hi to the desert land and may the best team win, so long as that team is the Yankees. But if they don't—look out!

Ed is our number one Yankee fan.

Ask Ed who's in the cabinet and he'll tell you what a great pitcher Babe Ruth was; ask him how the economy of New York has been hurt by the tax-revision law of last year and he'll tell you what a great manager Casey Stengel was back in the Fifties. Ed has a ready answer for everything. "Give me the good old days, sir, when baseball was baseball and not the game of

aim-for-the-fence it has become . . ."

And this is the man who was to be my boss for the next few eventful days. Might as well face it.

He's a little bit of a guy behind a big desk in an office that seems constructed entirely of framed, autographed pictures of sports celebrities.

"Hello, Ed," I said as I carefully removed a half-dozen framed, autographed pictures of sports celebrities from a chair. I sat down gingerly, hoping there were no pictures concealed beneath the upholstery.

Marcy's gaze, somberly chilling, seemed fixed on a spot above and to the right of my left ear. "Hayden," he said, "you stink!"

I turned my head to follow his glance. It was directed to a framed, autographed picture of Joe DiMaggio. Or so I had always heard him called. Joe DiMaggio-Hayden. Well! Hyphenated, probably. I turned back and waited for him to bring his eyes down to my level.

"Ten years now," Marcy continued, without taking his eyes from Di-Maggio-Hayden, "I've been taking you from that column to put you on the best bit of writing you

could possibly do, and for ten years . . ."

So it wasn't *that* Hayden he was talking to, but this one, me, Joe Hayden . . .

". . . all I get from you is how much better the Babylonians or Mayans or Cretans . . ."

"Cretans, Ed," I said.

". . . were without the silly game. Remember last year? . . ."

"It isn't entirely dim."

"For the World Series opener you did a column on how much more noble was the pastime of ancient Persians as compared to ours."

"I got some nice letters," I said. "There was that rug dealer on Madison Ave. . . ."

"Shut up! Things are going to be different this year. No more free-lance. You're on *assignment* this time, and it's going to be a dandy. Just dandy. Ever hear of Tom Gorski?"

"Tom Gorski . . . *Tom Gorski*. There was a Maxim Gorski once . . ." I caught his eye, and shut up, fast.

"It's just barely possible that you could be the only person on the *Herald-Times*, in all the country, perhaps, who doesn't know about Gorski. Yes, even though you're called in every year to do ar-



The ball rocketed toward the plate—but which one?
And in what world?

ticles on the Series. So just a refresher on the strange case of pitcher Tom Gorski.

"During the regular season Gorski pitched twenty-one wins for the best record in the American League. He pitched and won the first and third game of the World Series against Brooklyn. Then, with the Yanks losing the second, fourth, and fifth games he was called on to save the series in the sixth game. Only he wasn't there to answer the call. Tom Gorski had disappeared, and didn't show up for two days. The Bums won the series four games to two. When Gorski did show up he told a weirdie of a story. He said he was kidnapped out of the stadium, the *stadium*, mind you, by three hoods, taken for a ride, brought into Grand Central where he was taken down to the basement and put into a room down there and later taken back to the stadium and allowed to pitch. He said he pitched that day and the next, and won both games. Of course Jeff Staley, the Yankee manager didn't bother to listen. He fired Gorski on the spot and threatened to have him banned from baseball for life. The Gorski business caused quite a stir, you can damn well imagine. I put

Ripon and Danay to work on the thing. They brought Gorski to me and we gave the lunkhead quite a going over one night, but couldn't shake his story. He was just too simple to make this thing up. To make the story shorter, I put myself on the spot for Gorski, got the Commissioner to hold off till I talked it over with Staley, and somehow got Staley to relent to the extent that he conceded Gorski might have been an unwilling victim of a hoax invented by some clever gamblers.

"Today Tom Gorski is the only warm-up pitcher in baseball. He warms the catchers up in the bull-pen. A year has gone by, and the same teams meet again. You aren't aware of it, I'm sure, but we are faced with an identical situation this morning. Today's game is a life-or-death one for the Yanks. They've got to win today. I want a story on Tom Gorski from you by game-time. Good-bye, Mr. Hayden."

I stepped out into the leaky remains of what had been a bright October morning, and knew there wasn't going to be a game today. The Yankee management didn't share my opinion. I was invited, by phone, to come over and talk

to Gorski, if I liked. I didn't like, but I went.

Tom Gorski was a tall, balding, solemn-faced man with the sloped shoulders and slow movements of a farmer. He had a large wad of chewing gum in his jaw and he masticated it with the same thoroughness and rhythmic motion of a cow at work on a cud. He was one of a small group of ball players all staring silently and solemnly into the leaden sky, as if by their concentrated gaze they were going to pull the sun from behind that gray curtain. I detached Gorski from the group and eased him over to a far corner and went to work on him.

I came right to the point. You've got to with the Gorskis of this world. "I'm with the *Herald-Times*," I said. "I work for Ed Marcy."

"A good man," Gorski said. "A *good* man!"

"Yeah," I agreed. "He said you pitched twenty-one games last year . . ."

"Pitched in forty-four games. *Won* twenty-one."

I looked more closely at Gorski and thought he looked suddenly more like a fighter than a ball player. Why the thought occurred to me I don't know except possibly

the scar tissue over both eyes, the bent look of his nose and a right ear that was more than a little caulflowered. I essayed a small joke. "Looks like you did some catching before you learned to pitch."

"Never caught a day in m'life. Been a pitcher right from the start."

"No, I mean you look like you used to fight."

"Yeah. Prelims. No money in it." He suddenly held up his index, thumb and second fingers. "See them?"

It was rather hard not to; they were inches from my nose. "Your fighting hand?" I asked.

"Nah! Pitching hand. Hundred and ninety-six strikeouts last year."

"Shame you didn't get into the last game," I said.

His face darkened. "Man says that lies! They switch catchers on me. Pitched both them games right here in the stadium. Won 'em, too."

"Didn't they switch the other members of the team, also?" I asked. It was a shrewd question, I thought.

"I never look at them bums," Gorski said. "Got to look at the catcher. Gives you the signals. Them hoods musta got to Shulte. Wasn't him behind the plate. Kept askin' for wrong pitches.

Fin'ly told him I'd do all the pitchin' and he'd just do all the catchin'. Fed them guys smoke till they couldn't see. Best games I ever pitched."

I thought it was a shrewd answer, too.

I gave him what should have been the knockout blow: "How come you walked out of the stadium just before game time?"

"Them guys tole me they was takin' me down to sign a new contrac'. Said there was a new ruling. All contrac's got to be in 'fore game time. Didn't think much about it till we got to that room said 'Private—Keep Out'. Mighty small room for an office, I thought. An' way down in the third basement of Grand Central, too. But I follow them in an', wham! Like someone gave me a Mickey. I was dizzy all the time till I got back to the stadium. Never did get to sign the contrac'."

If only he'd have learned to duck like that in the ring . . . "If I told you the same thing happened to me would you believe my story, Gorski?" I asked.

"Yeah? Did you get dizzy, too?"

I thought we'd made full circle on this merry-go-round. I had enough material for an

opening—of two sentences. I shook the three-fingered pitching hand, walked silently past the group still trying to pull the sun out of hiding, and out of the stadium. I came to the conclusion I didn't have much choice as to road to take, as I got back into my Ford. All roads were going to lead back to Purgatory, Ed Marcy, that is. I had the whole of two hours to dream up a story on Tom Gorski. More like a nightmare. I headed south against traffic already thickening in the rush to get parking. Rain or not there was going to be a full-house. And suddenly a thought pinged around the empty reaches of my brain.

The room marked "Private—Keep Out".

Had anyone ever bothered to go down to the third level of Grand Central and investigate? Why should they? It would only stamp them as belonging in the same league as Gorski. Still . . . What if there was a room marked "Private—Keep Out"? It's about time somebody found out.

The long empty corridor was like a dimly-lit tunnel stretching to right and left of the stair well. I tossed a mental coin and turned left. Thirty doors and a half-dozen turns later I stood face-to-

face with the door I had come looking to find. The very last door in the corridor. I turned the handle gingerly and pushed. Nothing. Pulled. Nothing. Then I noticed the spring-type lock. Ah-hah! All you have to do, Hayden, I said to myself, is make an impression, have a key made, and presto! you've solved the mystery. Now all you need, I carried the thought to its next step, is a piece of wax. H'm! Wax. Too bad I hadn't read the script beforehand. Wax . . . where does one get wax? I just wasn't the hero-type. No wax.

A memory came to me of a tube-like container of sand I had seen in the corridor. For cigarettes and cigars. And sometimes for gum, as well. I smiled. Gum . . . Next to wax gum was the answer.

I flicked off a few grains of sand, smoothed the surface of gray putty-like material, and pressed it against the lock. It made a nice clear impression. And up in one of the corridors on the street level was a shop where keys were made.

Ten minutes later I was back with a shiny brass key.

To my surprise the room was empty. A naked fifty-watt bulb hung from a black cord giving enough illumina-

tion for me to notice there was another door at the opposite end of the room. Well, so far so good. I was reaching for the other knob when it hit me. And it was just like Gorski described, like having a Mickey hit you.

I doubled up, clutching my belly with both hands. The door, I thought! You've got to find it! The pain in my belly was reaching up for the rest of my body when somehow, my frantically clutching fingers found the door handle. Nothing felt so good as the stale air of the corridor.

I managed to stagger up the stairs and out into the bright October sunlight. I leaned against a post, waiting for the dizzy spell to pass. Presently things took their normal shapes. There was the Air Lines Building directly across the way, and the Automat next door. Only someone had changed the signs. Now it was the Monorail Building, and Jasons' Cafeterias. Something else. The time was nine in the morning, by the clock in the Monorail Building. I looked at my strap watch. Eleven was what it showed. Too, I became aware of the blue sky. The post I was leaning against was a street marker. I looked up, and

shuddered. I was on Avenue M!

I counted ten. It wasn't enough. Twenty. And all the while my brain was busy as a Univac clicking away at its card punching. Gradually, like a Univac, the scraps of remembered information fell into place to make sense out of the jumble. The fantastic theories of even more fantastic theorists were no longer so. Gorski and I could both prove it. He had been taken into a *parallel* world, just as I had stumbled into one. But was it the same? And now other questions, other probings needled me. I was in the obvious, but was it the same one Gorski had been taken into? Somehow, I reasoned, it didn't make sense for the closet, which was a space-warp, in reality, to be that for more than one world. If the theories were right, and I was proving one out, the next parallel world was also in simultaneous existence, but needed another space-warp for entrance. I was satisfied I had solved the mystery of Gorski's disappearance. But what to do about it?

I lit a cigarette and watched the crowd pass. No different than a New York City crowd. Men in topcoats . . .

topcoats! I looked about and spotted a newsstand close by. I edged over and took a quick look at the headlines. One paper had: BIRDS NEED ONE MORE! Another: REBELS CAN'T LOSE THIS . . .

Well, there it was . . .

It was World Series time in both worlds.

I dug out a nickel, threw it on the stand and started to reach for a paper.

"Hey!" the newsboy scowled at the coin. "What're you trying to pull?"

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Get that phony thing off the stand, cheapskate."

I pocketed the coin. It looked like my money was no good in this world. I knew I had to get out to the ball park to prove something to myself, but how? A cab pulled up at the curb, and a woman got out. Even the cabs looked the same as ours. Just like the cars in the stream of traffic seemed no different. Cars . . . no different! A wild thought hit me. My car was in that other world, but one just like it was in this one.

It looked exactly like my Ford. There it was, parked a couple of streets down where I had walked in search of it. But what if my key did not

fit? . . . Coincidence? Luck? What the hell did I care. The key fit, the motor went smoothly into action, and we were off to the ball park.

Traffic was still light and the drive no different. I parked on a side street, and walked to the clubhouse entrance. The uniformed man at the door gave a cursory glance at the pass in my billfold and waved me in. "You know where it is, buster," he said.

It had to be in the same spot as Staley's office in Yankee Stadium, I reasoned. Nor did reason betray me. The setting was right, only the characters were different. A young, tall thin guy deep in conversation with a thick-set gray-haired man were at a desk by the far wall. Sitting in a leather settee was Tom Gorski. He looked the same as I had seen him last, still chewing on his cud of gum, still looking like the lost farmhand in search of a plow. I waved my hand at Gorski. He waved a three-fingered hand back at me. Fine, so far. But who were the others?

The young guy looked toward me from under upturned eyes. "Yes?" he asked in even tones.

"I'm from the *Herald-Times*," I said. "Thought I

might get some information."

"*Herald-Times*? Must be an out-of-town paper. Look, we're busy at the moment." He smiled. I didn't like his smile either, suddenly, like I didn't like the rest of him. "Why don't you see Joslyn, hunh?"

I walked over to the desk. There was a morning paper lying on it. I picked it up and read the headline. "BIRDS NEED ONE MORE." I folded the paper and stuck it into my topcoat pocket. "Joslyn? . . . Nah. I'd rather talk to you. But I don't know your name, or your friend's."

The older man suddenly gave me his attention. I felt a chill take hold of me at that icy glance. This guy could commit murder, I felt, then go out and enjoy a good meal right afterward. But I couldn't back down now. Not even if it meant murder, not even my own. "Now this guy," I said, jerking my thumb in Gorski's direction, "looks like Tom Gorski, of the Yankee pitching staff."

The old guy started to get up.

"Hold it, Miles," the young guy said. He continued to smile. I liked it even less than before. I gave the old guy the benefit of a doubt. He'd murder in the open, at least. The

young guy was the kind that'd wait till it was dark, and then he'd want your back for his knife. "I think I know what he's talking about; the business of Alswin's substitute."

"Oh," I said brightly. "Just a substitute, eh? Well, it cost our team the World Series, last year. It also almost barred Gorski, the guy you borrowed, from ever playing organized baseball again."

"That must have been rough," the young guy said. He looked at his watch, looked back at me. "But we had to, you know."

"You know," I said, "I'm curious. Just like all newspapermen. Even in your world. Mind explaining?"

"Not at all. Alswin was our best pitcher. He went sour the last week, and we were down three games to two. Something had to be done. So . . ."

"Grayme!" the older man suddenly growled. "What the hell's the matter with you? You gone crazy, telling this reporter these things?"

"Now, Miles," Grayme soothed the other lightly. "Why don't you leave this to me, and you just tend to your ball master-minding?" He turned to me again. "As I started to say, something had

to be done. It so happens I own this ball club. I had a lot of money invested in, shall we say, proving some people wrong who thought the other team could win. I was in no mind to lose this money. So I sent several men into your world to get this Gorski person. Needless to say I didn't lose my money."

I said: "That was pretty clever of you. Just sent some men into a world you couldn't possibly have known existed . . ."

"Oh, but I knew it did. Even knew where the space-warp was. Technically this club belongs to the Institute for Advanced Physical Studies. I am head of the Institute. It was a simple matter of force calculations." He suddenly looked at his watch again. I don't know why but it bothered me, this business of time consulting. Then he was looking at me again. "The real difficulty was in managing the kidnapping of the other pitcher. Fortunately, I reasoned he must be akin in nature to Alswin. Of course, I was right."

"But, of course," I said. "Guys like you are always right. Even when you're wrong, all the way from the time you were born. This

year, I suppose, Alswin's in the pink, so you don't need Gorski."

"Correct. Alswin's never been better."

"I see. Well, guess I'll be going."

"Mind if I ask where?" Graymes asked.

I turned and faced him again. "Sure you can ask, and I don't mind telling you. I'm going to one of your newspapers and tell him the whole story. If your newspapermen are like ours, and I don't think there can be too much difference, the baseball picture's going to change before game time. Maybe the Birds won't even have to bother playing this game to win the series."

The cat-with-the-mouse-smile again was thrown my way. "You *are* what you profess to be," he said. "I'm certain of it. Just as I was certain what you had in mind to do. But I think you might not have time for all that. You see," he looked at his watch again, "the space-warp-closet will be just another closet in just forty-eight minutes. Not really enough time for you to do all that, and get back to your world."

So that was why the watch-watching. Pretty cute, this

grimy Grayme, this dirty, lousy . . .

"I'll risk it!" I snarled.

"'Fraid not!" Grayme said sharply. "Alswin, take him!"

I moved, then, only not the way they thought. I went in, toward Grayme, and as he got up to meet me I let him have it. The toe of my shoe caught him just below the knee cap. It was just like kicking into a melon, only my toe didn't go all the way in. Grayme screamed and went over backward. I whirled, parried Alswin's wild swing and threw a straight right. It caught him in the left eye. He wasn't going to be able to see many signals with that eye. As his head went back I chopped him just below the Adam's apple with the side of my palm. He threw both hands to his throat, gagged and bent forward. My knee made a satisfying sound against the softness of his nose as I straightened him up.

And the room whirled around in a fireworks display as Miles splintered a chair over my skull.

I went staggering forward and slammed into the door. He came at me, and once more I proved I was a pretty good football player. I made a nice place kick into his belly.

He sat down, mouth open and eyes popping. And I turned, opened the door, and went out of there as fast as I could travel. Those I passed must've thought I was jet propelled.

The guard at the gate took one look at me, threw up a hand to stop me. "Hey! Where you go . . ."

I gave him a shoulder and he staggered out of my way. I could feel the sticky wetness of blood running down the left side of my face. My eyes weren't quite in focus, but I knew where the car was. The guard's bellowing made people stare. Or maybe it was the blood pouring down my face. I didn't care. Not after I got into the car.

I put my foot on the throttle and zoomed out of there like as if I was in a hot-rod race. I turned left at the first corner and gave it full gas. I was on a one-way street, going the wrong way. Cars parked on both sides. And midway down the block a small truck was parked, leaving only enough room for a single car to get by. Too late I caught sight of a car coming toward me. Well, I didn't know whether they played chicken in this world, but I was soon to find out. I must have been hitting seventy when I reached the parked

truck. I found out. The other guy chickened.

I caught a quick glimpse of a wild-eyed face as I zoomed past. I had forced the other driver almost into one of the cars parked along the curb. I looked at my strap watch. It was a normal thirty-five-minute drive. I had forty minutes to make Grand Central, or whatever they called it. That is if Grayme was right.

The needle on the speedometer kept sliding between sixty-five and seventy, but I knew I couldn't keep it at that pace. Besides I was worrying about how long I was going to be able to duck the cops. I wasn't kidding myself that there wasn't an alarm out for me.

Presently I was on what seemed to be Broadway. The street was wider, but traffic was also heavier. I shot past a red light, and another and third. Luck was still with me. The streets kept getting into lower numbers and soon they were in double figures. And still no cops.

The first squad car showed up at about Seventieth.

They came in off a side street, siren wailing, a couple of hundred feet behind me, and closing in fast. I knew

they'd have me in a couple of blocks. I was on the right hand side of the street. I saw a green light coming up at about Sixty-fifth. And made a sharp *left* turn from my outside right lane into the cross street. Dimly, I heard the high squeal of brakes, the sudden crashing sounds of bumpers meeting as oncoming traffic piled up momentarily. Then I was in the clear.

Two streets over I swung right again and headed for Avenue M. I had lost the first squad car. The second made its appearance at about Forty-eighth. I beat him down to Avenue M by about a hundred feet. I braked hard into the curb, jumped out of the car and ran the rest of the way. I figured I was just as fast afoot as they were. And with more reason to be.

They were still a hundred feet behind me when I hit the top of the stairs at Grand Central. Nor had they gained any by the time I got down to the third level. I lost them completely at the first turn in the last corridor.

And there was the door I was looking for.

Only minutes now, if I was lucky.

I stepped inside, heard the door swing shut, and took a half-dozen faltering steps.

"Please," I prayed aloud. "Please. Hit me like it did before. Please hit me." Another step. Nothing. And another.

And doubled over once more with that agonized feeling, at the third step.

I staggered out of the room, got my bearings and dragged myself wearily up the three flights of stairs. The bleeding had stopped, but I thought it would be better to wash the blood from my face. By the time I got to the wash-room I was so dizzy I had to hold onto the wall for balance. Washing my face cleared the cobwebs from my brain to some degree. But I felt a little sick to my stomach when my fingers touched the spot where Miles had laid the wood to me. There was a gash a couple of inches long and maybe a half inch deep in my skull.

My wrist-watch said two minutes after twelve when I opened the door to Ed Marcy's crazy office. Only a little more than an hour ago I had stepped into that room down on the third level of Grand Central. I felt myself swaying as I stared at Marcy, trying to focus the two of him into one. It wasn't easy.

"Hayden," his familiar rasping voice growled impa-

tiently. "Where the hell you been, in a fight?"

Now there was one of him.

I stepped forward, walking gingerly, as if on eggs. "I got a story for you, Ed," I spoke carefully. "Y'know, Tom Gorski . . . well, he didn't lie. I been there, Ed, where he was. Spoke the truth. Should of believed him. He's too dumb, that farmer, to tell a lie. I know."

"You're drunk."

"Nah. Wish I was. Maybe I'd feel better. Truth, Ed," I said. And suddenly felt a great weariness. What was the use, I thought. He wouldn't believe me. No one would believe me. Parallel worlds. I cracked a smile at Marcy, and jammed my hands into my topcoat pockets. "Nah! You wouldn't believe me, you wisenheimer . . ." I stopped in mid-sentence. I had felt the newspaper I had jammed into my pocket. They say seeing is believing so . . .

I tossed it onto the desk.

Marcy looked at the first page, then carefully turned the pages to the last one. When he looked up at me again there was a far-away look in his eyes. "No," he said as he slowly began ripping the paper into shreds. "They won't believe you, nor me. They'll call it a fake, a hoax.

So we won't give them a chance, Joe. But *we* know."

Suddenly something solid came up to meet me . . .

When I opened my eyes again the first thing I saw was Ed Marcy. I was in a hospital room.

He had been reading a paper. He looked at me, and smiled. "Hi, kid. Hey. Let me read something here. ' . . . and so today the baseball world acclaims again the astuteness of Jeff Staley, manager of the New York Yankees. The old fox did it again. Who else but Staley would keep someone like Tom Gorski on the bench a whole season, then throw him into the two crucial series games? And win with him? The old fox will go down into history with this series . . . ' "

I managed to ask: "How did you get him to, Ed?"

"It wasn't easy," he admitted. "But I managed. One thing about old Jeff. He'll gamble, give him the right odds. And I made my point. Oh, by the way, want to see the by-line?" He tossed the paper onto my chest.

I picked it up.

There it was, nice and clear. By *Joe Hayden* . . .

The last thing I wanted.

To be on sports, permanently . . .

THE END

The Forgetful Celibate

By E. K. JARVIS

Don Gangler didn't think one of life's greatest pleasures should hinge on so small a thing as a can opener.



DON GANGLER fumbled through his pockets as he felt the heat of his wife's eyes blazing into him. He tried his pants pockets, side and rear, then his shirt pocket and all the suit jacket pockets. He emptied out his side pants pocket and pulled them inside out in a final gesture of despair.

Mrs. Gangler was tapping her foot, trying to keep her anxiety to a steady tempo.

"You forgot the tickets?" she asked. She had been prepared to ask that as soon as Don had begun fumbling for the tickets outside of the lobby, but she managed to convey a heroic portion of disbelief and an equal mixture of

astonishment that one male could be so singularly devoid of standard mental faculties.

"You forgot the tickets?" she repeated, this time getting more of a bite of incredulosity into it.

"Yes, dear, I forgot the tickets." His face took on an expression of resignation. "Well, it probably wasn't such a good show anyhow."

"Try your wallet." Her voice was sharp and snappy. With her growing audience she was feeling the power at her command.

"I did," Don answered silently.

"Try your hatband," said someone in the crowd.

Don reached up quickly and then pulled his hand down. He wasn't wearing a hat. His movements brought about a round of good-natured laughter from the ring of spectators.

His wife glared at him, leaning forward as if ready to bite him. "You'd forget your head if it wasn't tied on to you."

"You certainly have a way with words," Don muttered softly as he shrunk back, as if trying to disappear into the lining of his jacket.

"Oooh," said his wife with disgust and exasperation. She turned on her heel and stalked

off. Don started to follow slowly, tapping his pockets in an exploratory manner.

"Now let's see," he mumbled to himself, "where did I put the parking lot ticket."

Don drove home in silence. His wife didn't.

"And how about the time you forgot our invitations to the Hollisters Spring Dance?"

"It's just that I changed my pants. Can't a man change his pants?"

"And how about when you forgot the salad dressing when we had the Baxters over for supper?"

"Everyone forgets salad dressing. I bet that every man in this country over 21 has forgotten salad dressing at least once in his life." He turned in annoyance.

"And how many times have you forgotten to take your shirts from the cleaners when we were supposed to go out and had to run around borrowing shirts for you? And how many times did you forget to put gas in the car and we ran out on back roads shivering and catching cold waiting for someone to give us help? And how about the time we went on a picnic and you forgot the can opener? And how about . . ."

"Everyone forgets salad

dressings," was all he could mumble.

Don sat in his living room puffing away on his pipe. He heard the sound of his wife's easy, regular breathing coming from the bedroom. He stared out the front window looking, but not really seeing, the row of cars parked outside, the even lawns and the row of front doors that all looked alike.

Yes, it was too true. He was forgetful. He didn't know why. Certainly he didn't want to forget to leave himself open to the abuse leveled at him by his mate. But maybe he was a secret masochist and his unconscious was working solely so he would be granted the opportunity of being chastised and reviled. Some people love to be put upon and punished. Was he one of those? Was his forgetfulness a symptom in a hidden urge to be pushed around?

He took another puff and a curl of smoke seeped into his eye and snapped him back to reality. Did he forget because he didn't really love his wife anymore and this was a psychological weapon he employed without realizing it, to cause her trouble and consternation? Was it his way of getting even? He had been mar-

ried 11 years and during each year he had become increasingly more forgetful. Maybe there was something to that theory. If it kept up he would be dwindling his life away, falling deeper and deeper into the pit of forgetfulness, gradually being unable to remember his name or where he lived or how to tie his shoes, for that matter. It rankled him more than anything else (his wife excluded) had rankled him for a long time. He took a few more puffs and decided then and there that he would have to do something about it.

Instead of going to the bank the next morning, Don went to the Air Patrol Recruiting Office. He was 34 years old, one under the limit. His eyes were okay and so was his wind. He scored quite well on the intelligence test and aptitude quizzes. Fortunately there was no memory test. When Don left the office he was a member of the Air Patrol. He was so pleased with himself that he forgot about the traffic lights and nearly was run over by a speeding taxi as he crossed over to his car.

"You're what?" said Mrs. Gangler when Don came home that day.

"That's right," he said, puffing away, looking more smug than he had ever allowed himself to look, "I'm in the Air Patrol."

"What am I going to do?" she asked.

"Join some other branch. I don't care," he said casually.

"I'm going to leave you. I'm not going to wait here and sit around while you go flitting about the moon and stars."

"Not moon and stars. Only satellites. Besides a man like me feels the need of some adventure. I just can't sit here and rot away." He knocked his pipe and tried to look like a professional soldier of fortune.

Mrs. Gangler shook her head. "You're in your second childhood. I should have known when you started forgetting where you parked the car when we went to the movies." She stood up. "If that's the way you want it. As long as the bank accounts are in both our names I'll stick around at least for a while. In fact, it might be wiser for me to do just that if you'll take out a whopping insurance policy on your life. You'll do that, won't you?"

Don sucked on his pipe and looked superior. "If I don't forget."

Three months later Don re-

ceived his commission as second space lieutenant in the Air Patrol, Rocket Exploration Division. His memory had deserted him quite often in his military career, but then he didn't expect to have it cured in a day. He continually forgot the salutes, the proper way to clean his ray pistol and the call of command when he stood guard nights outside the lonely desert compound. Still, his ability was unquestioned and he scored high marks consistently on the achievement exams.

In one adverse manner his memory gave him satisfaction—he had completely forgotten about Mrs. Gangler.

One bright October morning, Don along with the other officers was summoned to the main field shack. A surprise venture was underway. A new batch of roving asteroids had been discovered containing what appeared to be valuable ores. It was the Rocket Exploration's Division to land on the asteroids and claim them for the country.

"This is a tough mission," said Col. McCoy. "We need 12 officers and 144 men to volunteer. You may expect to encounter strange climatic conditions and rare atmospheric surroundings. It will re-

quire a long, arduous journey and a lonely, solitary stay once you reach your destinations. Complete survival kits and all other operational gear have been designed and constructed to allow you to feel as much at home as possible. Everyone must be equipped with special Rocket Division appliances for this junket."

He read a long list of necessary items to be carried and asked that the officers make a note of these and secure them immediately upon leaving. There were 28 items in all ranging from G-V nuclear resistant glass shield for their planetary helmets to G-V can openers for the survival and maintenance food and equipment to be used on the asteroids. They were to be worn around the belt at all times.

"Good-bye and good luck," said Col. McCoy when he finished.

The men filed out.

"Lieutenant Gangler."

Don turned around.

It was another lieutenant. "You forgot your hat."

Don smiled weakly and thanked him.

The first couple of days of the flight into the upper reaches went peacefully. Speed was maintained and there had not even been any

close calls with the whirling meteors which had caused trouble in the past. They would land on the first of the asteroids in three days if they kept up the present pace. Don was second in command of a group of 20 men. He was in the rear of the ship when the cry of alarm came from the spotter. Before he could react a tremendous force slammed into the ship.

Don fell to his feet and stayed there. The tables and lockers inside the ship went whirling. A gaping hole loomed above him. Several men were sucked through the opening. Others tumbled around like corn being popped and one by one dropped through the hole.

Don shut his eyes and clung to the overhead bar. He squeezed it with hands and arms and shoulders until he cried. Then there was a sudden lurch and a whack. The ship bounced once, twice—then all was still and silent.

For a long moment he hung in his peculiar cramped position. Then forcibly, he pried his hands loose. Finally, he unwound his arms from the pipe and dropped to the floor. He wobbled and fell to his knees, weak and trembling. With the little strength that was left he crawled to the door. It was

locked. He looked at the gaping hole and dragged his body toward it. A quick appraisal of the ship told him he was the only survivor. He reached the hole and looked out. Dim sunlight hung lightly about the flat land. A moment of panic hit him when he realized he was alone, but then the discipline which had regimented him in the bank and his military training came to his aid. He felt sure and confident.

In a moment the cramps left his body. He struggled to his feet walking hunched over like an ape with a stomach ache.

The supply cabinet was ripped open but Don saw with relief that dozens of cases of cans were still inside, scattered around. He quickly checked his equipment belt which had remained secure around his waist. The emergency equipment belt which circled his middle plus the well-filled supply cabinet gave Don a big surge of hope. He actually smiled when he thought of the peace and calm that would be his, for a while at least. He hoped it wouldn't be too long before somebody spotted him and got him off. But at least he wouldn't have to worry about starving. In addition, he could patch up the hole and he'd be able to stay inside the

ship. He had his space gun still in his holster with plenty of bullets in case he was attacked.

He took a cautious walk around the smashed ship. The land was deserted. Don assumed it to be an uncharted asteroid. Maybe when he got back he could name it Gangler Shelf or Ganglerville or something. The ground was firm but seemed to be bubbling slightly with warm water. The temperature was ideal, Don noted with relief. That would be something he might not be able to deal with so effectively if the temperature was too hot or too frigid for him.

Satisfied that he was alone on the asteroid he went inside the ship and opened the supply cabinet. He ripped open the first box and took out a small, cylindrical can.

This can contains peas, ready-cooked. They may be eaten immediately after the can is opened. The can may be opened only by a G-V-3 single-hole opener.

Don reached into his belt and found the G-V-3 single-hole opener. A minute later he was enjoying some well-cooked peas.

He dug down farther into

another case and came up with beans. The can bore the same instructions except that opener G-V-4 two-ply lined would open it as it was of different size and construction.

A little more digging and Don found steaks and still later, milk.

Another search disclosed apple pie which could only be opened by G-V-3 Slitter. The pie was just like Mother Cabelli's bakery used to make back home in Templeton, Don decided.

When he was done eating, he went to his bunk and went to sleep. It wasn't a bad existence after all. No disturbances, no nagging wife . . . the thought brought him back to Templeton for a moment. He didn't miss her one bit. But the thought came to him, though, that at least she was a woman and that was more than he had at the present. Well, he shrugged, you can't have everything.

"I should be happy I'm alive," he said, turning over and dozing off.

The days went on. Six, seven, eight. The supply was good for a while yet. The radio equipment was beyond repair even had Don known how to go about fixing it. The more he began getting acclimated to

his surroundings the more he thought of his loneliness and how damn nice it would be to have a companion, a female companion. Col. McCoy was right it would be a lonely, solitary stay. That night he dreamed that a reigning movie queen visited him. He woke up with a very real feeling of disappointment. That day was spent eating and grumbling and wishing. The time dragged on.

In an effort to alleviate the pressure of solitude which had begun to bear down on him, Don dug deeper into the supply cabinet, hoping to come up with an exotic dish which might heighten his appetite and divert his thoughts from dwelling so heavily on women. He found asparagus, beets and cabbages, which hardly can be called fit substitutes for a mental image of a lady. Then his hand came in contact with an unusual object. It wasn't cylindrical like the others, it was . . .

Don whipped the can out and read the label. His eyes moved swiftly.

This can may be opened only when a division or part thereof is stranded on a strange world for a period of more than a month. It contains equivalent of one hour's

intimate companionship with a desirable female.

Ingredients—Top secret.

Ration—One per man.

Instructions—May be opened only with a G-V-34 Driver.

Don put down the can easily, almost daintily, so he wouldn't injure it. Then he let out the loudest yell he had ever let out. Women! Women! He checked the supply cabinet case. There were 64 cans of women. And all his! He hurriedly dug into his emergency equipment belt. He pulled out the G-V-30 Driver by mistake. In his eagerness he tried it on the can. It didn't work. That was to be expected. He searched for the G-V-34 Driver. Then his fingers began to fumble frantically and a blanket of apprehension came over him.

One by one he flung the

tools on the ground, with each clank of metal, his alarm increasing. Then they were all on the ground. Don stared at them. Then he started crying. He sobbed bitterly.

"I forgot it. I FORGOT IT."

He leaped to his feet and picked up the can and began hammering at it. The tools made only slight dents in the steel surface of the can. Don threw it on the floor and stamped up and down on it viciously. Then he kicked it savagely. It shot through the hole and outside. Don scrambled after it. He caught up with it and kicked it again. He chased it and screamed, kicking it and shouting at the top of his lungs, racing and lunging like a maddened soccer player, cursing and stumbling and crying as he kicked the can across the lonely, flatlands of a lost world.

THE END

Gay, Rollicking! Risque! Side-splitting! These words hardly do justice to the exploits of a zany scientist who trips pretty girls by way of research and materializes beautiful nudes in—

THE WIFE FACTORY

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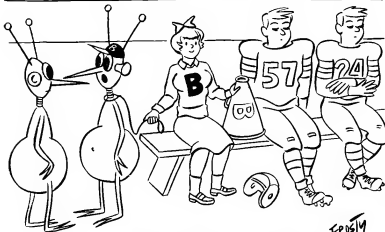
The big corporations have fallen into the habit of sending scouts to the college campuses in search of likely-looking young geniuses. And we're told that prospective chemistry talent is hardest come by. So here's a quiz on the wonders of chemistry. A high score won't necessarily get you a vice-presidency from Du Pont, but then again, a Du Pont vice-president might flunk this quiz. (Answers on p. 112.)

	T	F
1. The atomic weights of elements are measured in units based on the weight of hydrogen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Mendeleev developed the periodic law of the elements.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. The element found in greatest quantity in the earth's crust exclusive of oxygen is iron.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Living organisms are largely composed of compounds of nitrogen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Neon, one of the rarest gases on earth, seems to be present in large quantity in the very hot stars.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Marble is actually calcium carbonate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Chlorine is the most active member of the halogen family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. The elements in the periodic table are listed in order of their atomic weights.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The outer layer of Jupiter gives evidence of containing large amounts of solid or liquid hydrogen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. The discovery of the rare earth elements has given scientists a tool for determining the age of the earth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. The element whose properties were predicted by the man who formulated the periodic law and which was discovered soon after is scandium.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Mercury is the only metal which is liquid at room temperature.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. In chemical reactions, hydrogen behaves like a non-metallic element.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Oxygen has been detected in the atmosphere of Venus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. The metal potassium in the form of a silicate is a common component of volcanic rock.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Selenium resembles sulphur in its properties.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Copper is never found free in nature.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. The reddish color of Mars indicates that it contains quantities of copper in its crust.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Phosphorus is present in some complex compounds of the human brain.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. The alpha rays emitted by radioactive elements are atoms of hydrogen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

TEST YOUR SPACE I.Q.

Answers

1. False. The basic unit is 1-16 the weight of oxygen. (Wt. of hydrogen—1.008). 2. True. He formulated his periodic law in 1869 and its principles still stand despite additions of new elements. 3. False. It is silicon. 4. False. Carbon compounds make up the study of organic chemistry. 5. True. It may have once existed on earth, but being light, escaped. 6. True. 7. False. Fluorine is so active that for many years it could not be separated from its compounds. 8. False. Their atomic numbers which in a few cases puts heavier ones before lighter ones. 9. True. Also helium. Its density is too low to be any other solid. 10. False. It is the radioactive elements with their regular rate of disintegration. 11. True. Mendeleev described it and in 1879 Nilson discovered it. 12. True. It melts at -39° . 13. False. It is like a metallic element. 14. False. There's no trace of oxygen but lots of carbon dioxide. 15. True. Feldspar and mica are the common names of such rocks. 16. True. So does tellurium, another rare element. 17. False. There are large deposits in several parts of the world, including Michigan along the shores of Lake Superior. 18. False. It is the result of oxidation of the metals in the crust, indicating that the oxygen in the air of Mars has been largely used up. 19. True. Also in the nerves and muscles. 20. False. They are helium atoms.



"Do you have any idea what a mascot is?"

BOOK LIST ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS (UFO)

As a feature of our special Flying Saucer Issue (October 1957) Raymond A. Palmer compiled this bibliography of volumes on the subject. We believe it is the most complete listing in existence on the subject and should be of great value to those interested. We apologize for not being able to place it in the October issue and sincerely hope we have not inconvenienced our readers too greatly.

OTHER TONGUES—OTHER FLESH. *By George Hunt Williamson. \$4.00.* Scientific evidence that there are other races in the skies overhead. A history, a collection of proof, and a sensational theory. The leading saucer book so far.

THE SECRET OF THE SAUCERS. *By Orfeo Angelucci. \$3.00.* A strange book indeed! An admitted psychic adventure, but it is backed up by witnesses! Real flying saucers, bringing a strange mental message to a man who lay unconscious in space and time for a whole week.

THEY KNEW TOO MUCH ABOUT FLYING SAUCERS. *By Gray Barker. Amherst Press, Amherst, Wisconsin. Felix Morrow, 10th floor, 115 E. 23rd St., New York, N. Y. \$3.50.* The strange manner in which flying saucer investigators have been silenced.

FLYING SAUCERS HAVE LANDED. INSIDE THE SPACE SHIPS (Sequel). *By George Adamski. Amherst Press, Amherst, Wisconsin. Abelard-Schuman, 404 Fourth Ave., New York, N. Y. \$3.50.* The first of the so-called "contact" books.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE FLYING SAUCERS. *By Aime Michel. Amherst Press, Amherst, Wisconsin. Criterion Books, Inc. 100 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y. \$3.95.* A French mathematician and engineer's solid estimation based on a great mass of investigation.

The following books are considered authoritative: (All remaining books in this bibliography may be obtained from New Age Book Store, P. O. Box 13, Palmetto, Florida.)

FLYING SAUCERS—FACT OR FICTION. *By Max B. Miller \$.75*
AIR FORCE PROJECT BLUEBOOK SPECIAL REPORT #14 1.00

STRANGEST OF ALL. By Frank Edwards.	3.50
FLYING SAUCERS. By D. H. Menzel	4.75
FLYING SAUCERS FROM OUTER SPACE. By Major Donald E. Keyhoe.	3.00
THE FLYING SAUCER CONSPIRACY. By Major Donald E. Keyhoe.	3.50
REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS. By Edw. J. Ruppelt	2.95
THE SAUCERIAN REVIEW, 1956. By Gray Barker	1.50
IS ANOTHER WORLD WATCHING? By Gerald Heard	2.75
BEHIND THE FLYING SAUCERS. By Frank Scully	2.95
MYSTERIES OF SPACE AND TIME. By H. P. Wilkins	3.50
THE CASE FOR THE U. F. O. By M. K. Jessup	3.50
U. F. O. ANNUAL, 1955. By M. K. Jessup	4.95
FLYING SAUCERS UNCENSORED. By Harold Wilkins	3.50
FLYING SAUCERS ON THE ATTACK. By Harold Wilkins	3.50
THE CONQUEST OF SPACE. By Dr. Gilbert Holloway	.50
THE BOOKS OF CHARLES FORT, Fortean Society	6.00
FLYING SAUCERS AND COMMON SENSE By Waveny Girvan	3.50
THE EXPANDING CASE FOR THE U. F. O. By Jessup	3.50

The following books are called "contact" books, because they relate alleged encounters and rides in flying saucers.

STEPS TO THE STARS. By Dan Fry	\$2.50
THEY RODE IN SPACESHIPS. By Gavin Gibbons	2.50
ROUND TRIP TO HELL IN A FLYING SAUCER. By Cecil Michael	2.50
FLYING SAUCERS AT GIANT ROCK. By Michael	1.00
THE SAUCERS SPEAK. By Williamson and Bailey	2.00
ALLAN'S MESSAGE TO MEN OF EARTH. By Daniel W. Fry	1.00
THE WHITE SANDS INCIDENT. By Daniel W. Fry	1.00
INTO THIS WORLD AND OUT AGAIN. By Van Tassel	1.50
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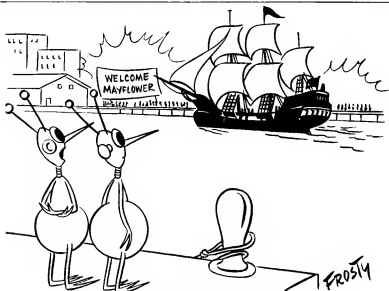
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SEA AND WAVES ROARING. By Franklin Hall	.25
SIGNS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH. By Franklin Hall	.25
FLYING SAUCERS. By Evelyn Whitell	.75



"Here I've been telling people back home
how up-to-date things are."



Membership in The Space Club has been climbing at a great rate. Requests for listing come from the 48, and all corners of the world. And our long-standing members tell us the response has been most rewarding. Don't miss your chance to expand your interests and your contacts. Join The Space Club NOW!

ALFRED ANDERSON, #24396, P. O. BOX 520, WALLA WALLA, WASH. . . . Alfred is 31 years old. At present he is learning to be a barber and at the same time he is finishing high school. His diversions, besides s-t, include stamp collecting. He hopes that he will have the opportunity to correspond with the many other science fiction fans throughout the world.

BETTY BARKALOW, 20 PROSPECT ST., LITTLE FALLS, NEW JERSEY. . . . 18-year-old Betty has just finished a secretarial course and is about to embark in this chosen field. She has blue eyes, brown hair and is 5'7" tall. Besides s-f she is interested in writing, skating, and dancing.

STONY BARNES, RT. 1, BOX 1102, GRANTS PASS, OREGON. . . . Stony thinks that The Space Club is a great idea. He is 15 years old, lives on a ranch and likes to read weird tales pre-1950. He hopes to trade with other people.

FRANK CERBASI, 522 36TH ST., UNION CITY, N. J. . . . A music teacher, Frank is 27 years old, 5'6" tall. He has composed some music of his

own. Other interests are: science fiction movies and books, reading, museums.

WAYNE DICKEY, POST OFFICE, CALLANDER, ONTARIO, CANADA. . . . Wayne is a 14-year-old tenth grader who is deeply interested in astronautics and related scientific fields. Through his appearance in The Space Club he hopes to gain many friends as enthusiastic about the high wide and deep as he is.

KERMIT W. ELLIS, JR., 610 MONTGOMERY ST., HENDERSON, N. C. . . . Kermit is a newcomer to AMAZING and seems to be very pleased with what he finds. He is a teen-ager now, and in the future he hopes to write s-f. He would like to hear from any other fans. Perhaps they will be able to help him find some past issues of the magazine.

WILLIAM A. GILLMORE, P. O. BOX 2279, 509 N. Y. AVENUE, WICHITA, KANSAS. . . . William has been reading science fiction for five years and he's just 14 now. That's really an early start! He is fascinated by astronomy, chemistry, enjoys chess and collects everything.

PATTY JACKSON, 915 NORTH 2½ ST., McALLEN, TEXAS. . . . A 14-year-old high school student, Patty says she hopes to hear from literally thousands of people. She likes reading, writing, all sports, drawing and collecting records.

H. E. LATHAM, ROUTE 5, BOX 5297, WENATCHEE, (SPOKANE) WASH. . . . Mr. Latham sends greetings from the Apple Capitol of the world. His hobbies are many and varied: science fiction, letter writing, home movies, stamps, coins, tropical fish, square dancing and calling. He says he wouldn't mind a bit if he got a lot of mail from interesting people.

STEVE M. MARR, 318-B CYPRESS ST., ALAMEDA, CALIFORNIA. . . . 15-year-old Steve wants other Space Club members to know that he buys, sells and trades coins (and/or paper money). He has noticed that many of the club's fans are coin collectors also.

EARL A. ROCKWOOD, 218 WATER ST., CLINTON, MASS. . . . Earl is 32 years old, 5'8" tall, weighs 175 pounds, has brown hair and brown eyes. His hobbies are stamps, science and science fiction and photography.

DAVID ROLFE, 3136 E. 11TH AVE., SPOKANE, WASH. . . . David would like to hear from all teen-agers who would be interested in becoming part of a group of amateur teen-age s-f writers. He and some of his friends are starting an s-f writers club which will publish a fanzine and they would like more members. Those interested in it should write directly to David.

CAPT. PATRICK H. TAYLOR, 0-2014521 HQ'S. I CORPS ARTY., APO 358, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF. . . . Capt. Taylor has been an s-f fan for 10 years. At present he is stationed in Korea just north of the 38th parallel. He is 29 years old, 6'3" tall. Other interests include political science, classical music and golf. Correspondence with people of similar interests would be most welcome.

GEORGE H. WADE, 206 NEW STREET, SPRING CITY, PENNA. . . . George's entry into The Space Club runs as follows: 23 years old, 5'9" tall, brown hair and hazel eyes. His hobbies: collecting white pennies and foreign coins. Activities include sports, reading, movies and many others. He is in his second year of graduate work at Penn State where he is getting a masters degree in business management. George is interested in obtaining some back copies of AMAZING and hopes that he will get help from Club members.

EDWARD WEISMAN, 15 SALEM ROAD, EAST ROCKAWAY, N. Y. . . . 15-year-old Edward became interested in science fiction when he was given a copy of AMAZING STORIES several years ago. His other interests include stamp collecting and electronics, especially tape recording.

PFC. DAN W. WILHITE, US-555 49169, CO "D," 9TH INF. REG., APO 371, SEATTLE, WASH. . . . Dan is 21 years old and married. He is interested in corresponding with others concerning E. S. P. He closes his letter with a question: Do you really think that any of the readers know anything about it? Well, readers, what do you have to say?

DAINIS BISENIEKS, BOX 2065, ANN ARBOR, MICH. . . . 20 years old, Dainis is 6'1" tall, weighs 145 pounds. A student at the University of Michigan he has an extensive collection of science fiction. He is looking forward to exchanging opinions and ideas with anyone, anywhere, particularly in the Midwest. Subjects he does not want to touch are UFOs, astrology, and Shaver Mysteries.

FRED GALVIN, 840 ALGONQUIN AVE., ST. PAUL 6, MINNESOTA. . . . Fred is a 21-year-old math major. His interests, besides science fiction and math are chess (especially unorthodox varieties of the game, and Kriegspiel. He would like to hear from other people interested in these things.

JAMES MASON, 826 TENNESSEE ST., GARY, IND. . . . 27 years old, James is 5'8" tall, weighs 170 pounds. He is interested in s-f, music and friendship. James would particularly like to hear from girls between 20 or 30. He is handicapped and unable to get around very much.

DAVID DONOVAN, 56 WHITTIER RD., READING, MASS. . . . David's interests include: girls, s-f, music, and chess. He is 16 years old, and wants to hear from those who share his interests.

DONALD WALKER, 1801 NORTH BROADWAY, SHAWNEE, OKLA. . . . Donald wants to discuss books, stories and the s-f field in general. He is a jazz enthusiast and is partial to Harry Belafonte's records. His description: 5'11" tall, weight 150 pounds, has green eyes and brown hair.

RICHARD HARPER, BUTTE FALLS RANGER STATION BUTTE, ORE. . . . Richard is stationed in a pretty lonely spot far from everything. Mail would sure help to cheer up those long hours.

DARLENE L. V. MACKIN, 1960 W. BROAD ST., COLUMBUS, OHIO. . . . Darlene's hobbies are dancing, baseball, pictures and hiking. She has lived in Columbus all of her life. She wants to correspond with people throughout the world.

AL BASILICO, 17941 CHAREST, DETROIT 12, MICH. . . . 31 years old, Al is interested in s-f, sports, amateur astronomy, records, music, dancing, stamp collecting and coin collecting.

JUNIA DE OLIVEIRA, RUA DUQUESA DE BRAGANCA, 13, ANDARAÍ, RIO DE JANEIRO, BRASIL. . . . An ardent s-f fan, Junia is 15 years old. She would like to exchange used stamps from all over the world.

EDWARD R. JAZDZEWSKI, 2831 SO. HERMAN ST., MILWAUKEE 7, WIS. . . . Ed wants to obtain recent, verified, unpublished UFO reports with the intent of writing a book on them sometime in the not-too-distant future. Any theories about saucers will be greatly appreciated.

GEORGE H. WAGNER, 39 WILBERS LANE, FORT THOMAS, KENTUCKY. . . . George is a 15-year-old high school student. He is extremely interested in s-f and fantasy, both reading and writing it.

PFC DOUGLAS CLARK, RA 17463671, CO. A, (PROV.) 8th U. S. ARMY, SIG. BN. APO 59, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF. . . . Douglas is a young G.I. stationed in Korea. He likes s-f, sports, astronomy, astrology, electronics, animals, hypnotism, life on other worlds.

DANNY PRITCHETT, 228 WEST BRIDGEPORT ST., WHITE HALL, ILL. . . . Danny is 14 years old. His interests include electronics, E.S.P., robots, occultism. Others interested in these things will have much to exchange with him.

WILLIAM WRIGHT, BOX 117, C/O ERIC GORDON, OGDENSBURG, N. Y. . . . 15 years old, William is interested in science fiction and biology.

WAYNE DICKEY, POST OFFICE, CALLANDER, ONT., CANADA. . . . A tenth grader, 14 years old, Wayne is deeply interested in astronautics and related scientific fields.

ALAN J. LEWIS, BOX 37, EAST AURORA, N. Y. . . . Alan wishes to be listed among the members of The Space Club. He is 15 years old and interested in all branches of science. He puts out a fanzine of his own. He is pretty busy so cannot write too much but at least would like to exchange postcards.



by S. E. COTTS

PEOPLE MINUS X. *By Raymond Z. Gallun. 186 pp. Simon and Schuster. \$3.00.*

This is a novel with a cosmic theme; one that has always been of paramount interest to all people at all times—the processes of regeneration and recreation, in this case from a laboratory-produced material called vitaplasm. At first this marvel seems to be all to the good as through it innocent victims of disaster are restored to almost their old selves. Then the humans realize that the artificial people are their superiors in every respect. Mob feeling changes Mitchell Prell, one of the inventors, from hero to scapegoat and forces him to flee the human community. Ed Dukas, his nephew, and Ed's wife, Barbara, try to use reason to combat the mounting hysteria which threatens to explode in a war of annihilation. Failure seems very near. In a last desperate measure Ed and Barbara join Prell and all three sacrifice their humanity by becoming artificial people in order to function more effectively. All ends well, of course, when a plan is finally devised acceptable to both sides.

Unfortunately the treatment of all these serious matters from a craft angle leaves a great deal to be desired. The description of Ed Dukas at the bottom of the very first page is marked by a succession of stilted clichés.

The conflict that forms the core of the book, the fear and the hatred between the humans and the almost humans is a legitimate one. There is a great potential here for a suspenseful plot, for unusual characterizations, and a stage set for some very relevant soul searching on the place of these scientific advances in everyday life. Unfortunately the book fails in all three of these respects. One realizes that a disaster of cosmic scope faces the slate of characters, but Mr. Gallun doesn't really make one care.

CONQUEST OF EARTH. By Manly Bannister. 224 pp. Avalon Books. \$2.75.

This book is a revised version of the four-part serial, "The Scarlet Saint," published during 1957 in *Amazing Stories*.

The Ziff-Davis version is longer than the book and richer in description. When these parts are cut away, one realizes that Manly Bannister's dialogue is very stiff (though this may be a temptation when trying to put words in the mouth of such a superhero as Kor Danay). Also, the end result is not as full of suspense as the material might suggest because the science portions tend to fall into large chunks instead of being more a part of the action.

Earth has been under the rule of the Trisz for generations. Yet no one on Earth has ever seen even so much as a picture of the Conquerors. They were seemingly benevolent but they were really looting the planet, for the Trisz fed on pure energy and thus Earth was being robbed of its water supply and all else that made it habitable. The only hope of Earth lay in the Scarlet Order of Men, the one planet-wide organization that the Trisz tolerated because they did not realize that there the chosen few learned the mental disciplines and psychic powers that would eventually reclaim Earth for mankind.

It speaks well for the book that one's interest is held even in the revised version, but it is a shame to find a science fiction novel that has that often-screamed-for "sense of wonder" only to find it stunted in the later edition.

JULES VERNE, MASTER OF SCIENCE FICTION. *Selected and edited with an introduction by I. O. Evans.* 236 pp. Rinehart and Company, Inc. \$3.00.

This is an excellent selection of some of Verne's best writing. It ought to give pleasure not only to those who have already been introduced to him, but also to the newcomer.

Verne was one of the founders of science fiction along with H. G. Wells. His works are all in the form of voyages—to the interior of the earth as well as to space. He had a marvelous imagination as well as an astounding perception of the direction of modern science. Everything he wrote about was new and fresh and exciting to him. Those who have been bottle fed on the slick writing in some of our present-day magazines may be a bit annoyed at the style of writing. These critics would do well to remember, however, that Verne was not following a precedent but setting one, and that he is still being read and discussed now, a half century after his death.

Included in this anthology are excerpts from the popular favorites—"A Journey into the Interior of the Earth" and "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea"—plus some of his less well-known pieces.



BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

The stories in the August *Amazing* were about average, I thought. The editorial is what burned me up.

If you don't have any reason for writing an editorial, then don't write one. I'm referring to the plugs for *Popular Electronics*, "20 Million Miles to Earth" and the October *Amazing*.

Many magazines run ads for related publications. Some have "Coming Attractions" departments. But yours is the only one I know of that uses the editorial as ad space. You *had* a full-page ad for "20 Million," why an editorial too?

I agree with Ed Gorman that there should be more than 300 words under the heading, "The Observatory." There should be something to write about. Why call it an editorial? Why not a filler" or "house ad"?

I know there's a lot to being an editor—reading and rejecting manuscripts, planning issues, answering letters . . . but an editor has his closest contact with the reader in his editorial. That's where he should step in and say, "Another issue, boys . . . like it or not. But just between you and me . . ."

Ray Palmer built up the largest s-f magazine circulation in the world with that formula. He created a bond between himself and his readers. Good or bad, it wasn't "his" issue—it was "ours."

Destructive criticism is no good at all and I'm a reader, no expert, but maybe my gripe is reflected elsewhere.

Roger Ebert
410 E. Washington
Urbana, Illinois

● *We've always had unbounded admiration for Ray Palmer—as*

an editor and as a friend. And probably a portion of that admiration has shown through the pages of Amazing since we've been its editor.

Dear Editor:

Just thought I'd drop you a line and give you my opinion on a few things. I've just been reading s-f about 18 months, but I've bought loads of back issues of practically all the magazines from a dealer, so I've formed pretty firm opinions on some things.

Please, repeat, please leave your stories and magazine the way they are. Don't cut down on the "absurdities." If I wanted to read about "possibilities" I'd just read the paper. I like to read about "aliens," "heroes," and "creatures." "The Blue Plague" was tops, "Trick or Treat" was extra-good, with a wonderful ending, but as far as I'm concerned "Brief Hunger" was a waste of your paper and my time. Maybe I'm dense, but I just didn't get the point.

Congrats on your novel "20 Million Miles to Earth." Publish more!

Janice J. Coon
254 East Main Street
Los Gatos, California.

● *So you've been with us for eighteen months! That's fine. We'll be expecting to hear from you quite often during the next eighteen years, Miss Coon.*

Dear Editor:

I'm a bit late in reading the July *Amazing* as the August issue came out yesterday but when I finally did get around to it, I finished it in one sitting which only took a couple of hours. Hate to be a sour grapes, but I wish it would take longer and this could be solved by smaller type. Could you possibly use the size used in the Anniversary issue? That was perfect.

Valigursky turned out a pretty fair cover for this issue, which is pretty unusual for him. Lately he's been painting some miserable pictures.

It always seems that your lead novelets are so much better than the follow-up short stories. "A God Named Smith" could have been developed, possibly, into an even longer version but Slesar's story appealed to me somewhat. Very good for past issues.

The letter column didn't disappoint me this time as it usually does since most of the readers succeeded in *saying* something without completely dissolving into fits of passion about how great *Amazing* is, and how much they love space opera.

I agree with you partly on Ernie Husemann's letter in the fact

that I agree that there are an infinite number of possible science fiction plots (which is one reason why I prefer science fiction 100 to 1 over mysteries) and a magazine cannot cater to one reader's personal likes and dislikes. But then I agree with Mr. Husemann in the fact that 7-foot, 220-pound muscular heroes along with 40-18-40 females in Space Patrol Bikinis do not belong in a science fiction magazine any more than Wyatt Earp. You've been doing a pretty good job of keeping this type of trash out of the magazines, though . . . just please continue to do so.

Agreed with Clayton Hamlin that the stories of the old days would be most definitely welcome but I can understand your side of the story, too. You want to print the magazine that will *sell*. *Astounding* sells well too, but it must be hard as hell to cross that great gap and completely change your editorial policy. Actually, the only way to improve *Amazing* to the point of "older and better" stories could only be accomplished by folding *Amazing* itself and creating an entirely new magazine since *Amazing* and its companions have become so stereotyped in the field now that it would be sheer impossibility to completely change your policy and format no matter how long it took.

Bill Meyer
4301 Shawnee Circle
Chattanooga 11, Tennessee

Dear Editor:

You're quite wrong. It was Voltaire that said, "I disagree entirely with everything you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

Lyle Tryon, in the July issue of *Amazing Stories* is certainly taking the wrong outlook on s-f fans and fandom. Evidently he doesn't realize that readers of s-f are different than readers of other types of literature. It takes a lot to please them, granted, and it takes a good editor to please them, but when they're pleased you'll know it. Perhaps Mr. Tryon doesn't like to suit his tastes in writing to that of what the fans want.

They most certainly do not ask the impossible as Lyle asserts, but they do ask for "quality" s-f. Tryon will find, if he opens his eyes, that there are s-f writers who seem to have no difficulty in writing what the fans want. In fact, no one will dispute the fact that many of today's top s-f writers are graduates of fandom, and it is, I believe, because of their activity in fandom, that those writers can produce the material today's s-f readers enjoy.

"Fandom is a noose around the neck of fandom," states Lyle, but if it weren't for fandom where would science fiction be today? With that attitude Tryon would not even make the neo-fan stage.

Fandom keeps a constant check on prodom and if it were not for the influence that fandom wields, you editors would be in never-ending wonderment at what your readers do want.

Larry Sokol
4131 Lafayette Avenue
Omaha 31, Nebraska

● *Voltaire, huh? Well, a nicer guy couldn't have said it. That bit about fandom keeping a constant check on prodom is certainly true. This editor can't pick up the phone but what Jimmy Taurasi, editor of Fantasy Times, is on the other end asking, "What's new, chum? Give me the dope." But more power to Jimmy and the rest of the fanzine editors. Theirs is truly a labor of love.*

Dear Editor:

Since you dropped serials I'll be back with you again. I hope I haven't missed many without serials, but I stopped looking at any s-f that contained them.

Art Bonnet
Box 201
Hyde Park, N. Y.

● *No more serials—that's a pledge.*

Dear Editor:

"Monster on Stage 4," was one of the best stories in *Amazing Stories* that I've ever read—suspense, drama, excellent characterization and the ending was almost perfect.

I'd like to say right here and now that I'm selling out my whole stock of s-f and fantasy collection and I have plenty of books.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Alabama

● *You tell us you're selling out your s-f collection, but you don't say why, James. Don't keep us wondering like this.*

Dear Ed:

Sunglasses please!

Ah, now I can gaze at the Valigursky masterpiece that adorns the cover of the July *Amazing*. What a cover! It looks like a color photo and then some. I'm afraid, after I've seen what he can do, I'll be disappointed if covers on the following issues are not on a par with this eye-jerker.

If reader Husemann is looking for science he can try one of your

more "sophisticated" competitors. Most magazines now prefer action rather than atoms, plots rather than positronic accelerators.

When was the last time a good controversy appeared in *Amazing's* readers' section? Perhaps Mr. Tryon of Staten Island has precipitated one. Mr. Tryon states that fandom is responsible for "stifling the writers of s-f." It seems to me that the opposite is true. Fandom has produced many good s-f writers. A good example is the very prolific Bob Silverberg who often appears in your magazine.

It appears that the "good old stories" that everybody misses are the same ones that nobody wants to see in your magazines if they are in serial form. How about some of these in *Amazing Science Fiction Novels*? By the way is the aforementioned magazine annual, monthly, bi-monthly or what?

Peter Kane, Jr.
241 12th Street
West Babylon, N. Y.

● *We feel you're right about the "good-old-stories" business. We published a 30th Anniversary Issue last year, filling it with those grand old classics, and lots of letters came in saying: "Bub, you put in the wrong classics." So how're you going to know?*

Dear Editor:

I have heard many complaints about science fiction being westerns in disguise. Recently I have read a few science fiction books, specifically "Wild Bill Cursoe," "Black Jack Ceser," "The Wizard of California" and I agree that they represent westerns set in space.

Frederick Norwood
111 Upperline
Franklin, Louisiana

● *We can't comment on this, Mr. Norwood, because none of those titles are familiar to us.*

Dear Editor:

Congratulations! I finally found a story published in *Amazing* that I really liked. The story in question was "A God Named Smith." It was simply super. Can we have more like that? It wasn't tops, but it shows that *Amazing* is trying to improve.

I am glad that you finally took girls off your cover. Once in a while it is okay, but every month is too much.

Being one of Lyle Tryon's "noisome fans," I intend to be put on the record as defending fandom as well as myself. What probably happened was that fans decided they didn't like Mr. Tryon's stories and told the editor exactly that. Mr. Tryon is probably just rebel-

ling against fandom because of that. If I am wrong, Mr. Tryon, please let me know.

Fandom is a great idea. Instead of editors wondering why their circulation is dropping, if it is, they know why and can change whatever was wrong. Take *Amazing Stories*, for instance: the majority of its readers didn't like serials so the editor changed his policy and decided against running serials. With a Western pulp, the editor would never know what the majority of his readers wanted because they wouldn't write and express their opinion. Fandom is a wonderful thing, Mr. Tryon, a wonderful thing.

Kenneth Pearlman
1530 Mahantongo Street
Pottsville, Pennsylvania

● *If you're wrong, Kenneth, we've got a hunch Mr. Tryon will let you know in a real hurry.*

Dear Ed:

In regard to Lyle Tryon's letter in the July issue I must say that I most emphatically disagree with him in every respect with the exception that the editor's job is a hard one. Let's be practical. Without the approval of fandom no magazine lives long. Without fandom's praise and condemnation there could be no way for the editor or the writer to know what was wanted by the readers except to notice that when sales begin to drop off that must be something wrong with the type of material being published. Therefore, if a magazine wishes to survive the struggle, it must conform to the wishes of fandom; and the writer must also conform or cease to exist as such.

What does fandom expect? Contrary to Tryon's conception of fandom we want quality. Quality with a capital Q. This, I dislike to have to say, is what most s-f stories lack. And it has gotten steadily worse even in the last few years. In short the average fan wants quality, both in writing and in plot, fast-moving or thought-provoking, science-based stories with an added dash of humor now and again.

One other thing I'm sure that fen would like is that s-f be published in s-f magazines. Save the fantasy for the likes of *Fantastic*.

A. Mardis, Jr.
433 West Wilson Avenue
Bemont, Illinois

● *Obviously, fandom does wield an authority and carry definite weight. The question is—how much? Would a magazine based exclusively upon fandom's demands live very long? We're inclined*

to think not, but there's really no way of finding out because fandom itself is unable to give clear-cut directives. It is badly divided, opinionwise, within its own ranks.

Dear Editor:

Why do all of the letters in the letter columns in your magazine begin with "Dear Editor"? What's wrong with Mr. Fairman, P. W. F., or maybe some of your pen names?

I finished the four s-f publications of Ziff-Davis a couple of days ago. No complaints except for the novel. The title could have been better and the illos were out of sequence with the story. Also it said that the colessum is made of concrete. True or false?

The stories in *Dream World* are still kind of weak. How about reprinting some of Thorne Smith's short stories. Not excerpts from books, but short stories.

Valigursky's cover was very good on the July issue, better than some of them. Please, kind sir, how can I get the cover painting for it? By the way, who won the cover painting for identifying the sports blunder in "The Babbit from Bzlfsk" in the June issue and what was the mistake.

Who is Darius John Granger? C. H. Thames usually writes the "Mayhem" stories but the last one was written by Granger.

Franklin Bergquist
Eddyville, Iowa

● *The salutation is a standardized form, Mr. Bergquist. Our gal Goldsmith types up all the letters for the printer and for some reason she starts them all the same way. She probably has a logical explanation, but she's never around when I remember to ask.*

Dear Ed:

I am probably not the first to notice this error in your June issue but in the Space I. Q. Test, the sixth question is stated as follows: "The first manned rocket-propelled plane was the _____."

Your answer was the Bell X-1 (1946).

If I am not mistaken, the German Luftwaffe at the close of World War II put up a manned rocket-propelled plane against our bombers. This plane was made by the Messerschmitt Company and I think its Mod. No. was the Me-123.

I would appreciate knowing if I am correct.

Donald S. Mart
4438 Murietta Avenue
Sherman Oaks, California

● *You are correct. Our quiz-master was wrong.*

Dear Editor:

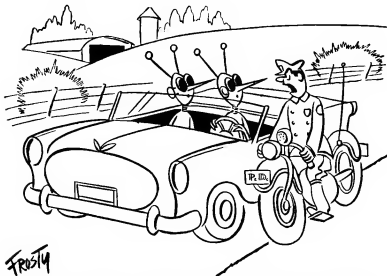
Thanks for listing my name in The Space Club. I've received several letters from some very interesting people and the correspondence truly makes us feel like next door neighbors. Hope it keeps up.

I don't agree with Steve Green and Richard Brown concerning the features "Amazing But True" and "Test Your Space I. Q." I find them very interesting and hope that R. S. Craggs will expand his feature and that the quiz will become a monthly feature.

Your *Amazing Science Fiction Novel* is a wonderful solution to the arguments about serials. Now everyone should be happy and be looking forward to more stories like "20 Million Miles to Earth."

Rudolph Orosz
2822 Stanfield Drive
Parma 29, Ohio

● *The Amazing . . . Novel got a tremendous reception. You'll be seeing more of them in the future.*



"Oh, a wise guy, eh—I suppose you're rushing for a spaceship."

Amazing But True . . .

It's A Steal

A young woman emerging from a bank in England had her purse snatched by a thief who made his get-away in a car. The purse contained three dead kittens that she was going to throw into the sea.

Harry Albacker, a professional entertainer in Maryland, had a suitcase stolen from his parked auto. The bag contained a 60-pound, ten-foot python.



A Toronto owner reported his car stolen from a lot near his home. Undergoing repair, the vehicle had no motor, no radiator, and was minus several fenders.



Two thieves broke into a house in Liverpool, England, and stole a three-piece suite of furniture, three chairs, a radio-gramophone, fourteen cushions and four carpets, as well as articles of clothing and food-stuffs. After police arrested the two men they wakened the family to tell them they had been robbed.

A janitor in Los Angeles was arrested for stealing a judge's robes. The thief claimed he was a church deacon and borrowed the robes to preach in.

Antonio Mendonza of Barcelona, Spain, gave himself up to police after robbing a fellow streetcar passenger of \$300. Mendonza said he'd never stolen more than \$2 in his life before and didn't know what to do with the money.

A New Jersey thief stole \$24 worth of horseshoes from a blacksmith shop.

R. S. CRAGGS

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